The CHANGELESS CHRIST

E. C. DARGAN

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The changeless Christ

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And Other Sermons

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BY

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I

THE CHANGELESS CHRIST

"Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever." Heb. 13:8.

THIS is a great utterance. What Jesus Christ was, that he is; and what he is, that he will ever be. The saying places him at the ever shifting center of history. As past and future from opposite directions converge on the present, so do they converge on Christ. God has summed up all things in him. (Eph. 1:10.) He is first in regard to all things (Col. 1:18), and in him all things hold together (Col. 1:17). The most impressive and wondrous personality of history, he centralizes "yesterday" in himself; the impulsive and attractive hope of humanity, he sways the future from both its poles, and encloses "forever" in the circle of his influence; a living and constant force for human good, he is found at the heart of the best progress

of men "today." As his immediate personal contact with his own age, though necessarily limited in range, was intense with life and power, so amid the complexity and extent of our life today there are certain focal points of influence where Christ is intensely active. This is a wondrous thing; but it is true. Leaving out many elements of our complex modern life we can find at three essential points sufficient illustration of our theme: Science, morals, and religion. And so, fathers and brethren, as I have thought and prayed over what message I should attempt to bring you, it has seemed to me appropriate to emphasize the "today" of this great text, so that we might consider together the place of power held by our Lord Jesus Christ in the life of our own time, as manifested in its scientific, ethical and spiritual phases.

The Scientific Phase

It is unnecessary to emphasize the large and influential place which "science" fills in the thought and life of modern times. Since the latter part of the eighteenth

century the progressive mental forces among men have been under the dominating and driving impulse of the scientific idea. Every department of life and thought has been powerfully affected. Great and astonishing achievements in the discovery of truth have been recorded and the methods used in this field have been extended to well-nigh all departments of thought. The scientific world has become intoxicated with its knowledge and power, and has too often been arrogant in its intellectual pride. Religious leaders have been sometimes frightened and angered, and sometimes led astray, by the claims of iconoclastic 'science''; and some men of science have been too hasty to conclude that their partial knowledge was really all there was to know, and have attacked religion too harshly. Thus, unhappily, needless conflict has arisen between religion and science, or rather between some scientists and some religionists. But now at last things are beginning to look better. Science is more respectful to religion, and religion is more friendly to science. And so it has become possible on both sides to

consider, with thoroughness and candor, the true place which our Lord Jesus Christ occupies in regard to the science of our times.

And first of all we may say that Christ is a proper object of scientific investigation. The objects of scientific research and exposition are phenomena, facts and forces. With all reverence be it said, Jesus Christ is each and all of these. In his historic appearance and abiding influence he is a phenomenon to be observed and explained; in his actual life and works and the effects still produced by him he is a fact beyond dispute; and in the great changes and results consequent upon his appearance and life he is a force to be reckoned with.

As a phenomenon, then, Christ demands observation and explanation. The first is easily conceded. He forces himself upon the notice of mankind. He cannot be ignored. Among the unusual, unique, impressive personalities of history he stands pre-eminent. His own query is, "Who do men say that I am?" The confident answer of discipleship to inquiry is, "Come and see!" Some explanation of so extraor-

dinary a character must be attempted. Science is challenged and must make answer. If protoplasmic mud, or a fly's foot, makes appeal to microscopic biology; if planets and stars, nebulæ and infinite spaces make appeal to telescopic astronomy; if mounds and monuments make appeal to ethnic archæology; if documents and literatures make appeal to historic criticism; if thinkers and systems make appeal to philosophic scrutiny; if the evolution of human relations makes appeal to the study of sociology; can science be excused if it evades or declines consideration of the phenomenon of the Christ? For that phenomenon two explanations are current. One is that Jesus Christ is, as other great men are, the product of human evolution. He was the child of human parents, gifted above the average, deriving his thought and character from his Jewish antecedents, influenced by his environment, moulded by the course of events, but impressing upon all these the mark of his peculiar genius. This may be called the natural theory of Jesus as a phenomenon. The other is the super-natural theory. Mark, it is not an un-natural theory. That

which ranges above the ordinary course of nature is not thereby contradictory to nature. The super-natural is neither impossible nor irrational. Therefore what may be called the super-natural theory of the Christ has, on a purely intellectual basis, as good claim to scientific recognition as the natural theory. The super-natural theory is, briefly, the belief that Jesus Christ as a phenomenon, is the expression of a direct divine interposition in the course of affairs; that he was born of a virgin by the immediate power of God; that so he is the Son of God in a peculiar sense; and as such is the mediator between God and man, being himself both God and man. Grant the existence, personality and activity of God, and the theory that Christ's appearance among men in his time and place was a real divine incarnation is rationally tenable as a scientific hypothesis. Choice between the theories, as in all such cases, must be determined logically by their relative ability to account for the facts in the case; and ethically by the character and inclinations of the person choosing. These last are usually the decisive factor, but at least rea-

son demands a thorough and candid consideration of all the facts in order to see on which side the greater probability lies.

Science is also required to give careful attention to Jesus Christ as a fact, for in truth he is in the course of human affairs a momentous fact, and must be so accepted and dealt with. Some faint conception of his value as a fact may be formed by imagining himself and all that he stands for subtracted from history. So is he to be considered both as a historic and a present fact. The former is generally conceded, the latter may by some be questioned. Further, in dealing with this double aspect of the matter we must bear in mind the obvious truth that Jesus as a fundamental and prime fact involves and subordinates a number of related facts. Not all of these are of equal importance, and some are less capable of convincing proof than others. Without going into details it is sufficient for our present purpose to say that the main facts of Christ's historic reality, and the general credibility of the accounts we have of his career, are such as to establish him permanently and immovably within the field

of scientific study. Moreover, those observable indications of his activity among the elements of our modern life and thought make it impossible to ignore the fact of his abiding influence. Whether we are to account for that as only an impulse from the past, or additionally and continuously as a living force in the present, will depend upon our personal relations to Christ. But the fact of his influence is here among us.

And this brings us to think of Christ as a force. Whatever theory of his person we may hold, whatever fact or facts concerning him we may accept or reject, it remains and must ever remain undeniably true that Jesus Christ was and is a force of the first magnitude in the moral and spiritual progress of mankind. As we are more fully to develop these thoughts in what follows it is enough here to mention them in illustration of the position that in its study of great forces science cannot and must not ignore "Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." (1 Cor. 1:24.)

There is also another point of view for regarding Christ scientifically, namely, that he is a contributor to scientific

thought. What he added to the knowledge of mankind in the most important sphere of human interest surely claims comparison as to value and effect with what any scientist has done in any field of research. When we think of how the great men of science have made their contributions to knowledge and thought, we shall find that the most obvious statements are in a measure true of Jesus. Every scientist is a traditionalist. The larger part of his science is derived from those who worked and taught before him. Absolute originality in the field of science would be an amazing mass of falsehood and folly. No science worth the name but rests on previous accumulation. Jesus recognizes the best religious tradition. He says, "I came not to destroy but to fulfill." This was true scientific method. It is today. (Let no sane man be terrified or more than amusingly angered by the epithet "traditionalist"; it is oftener a token of his critic's narrowness than of his own!) What was true in religious thought Jesus accepted and built on. But this was not all. Every scientist of note has made correction of previous mistakes and added

new knowledge or new view. This was also what Jesus did. The truths which he gave to the world concerning God and the soul had a newness and a power which smote contemporaries with amazement, and which the lapse of centuries has not been able to tarnish or weaken. Today, as yesterday, he is the world's greatest master on these high themes. How these great truths came to him we may not know or be able to explain. His was not the way of laborious investigation such as we now call by eminence the scientific method. Whatever we may venture to think concerning his mental processes, at least his times and the thought material with which he was chiefly concerned did not demand exactly the methods now in vogue. But however arrived at, truth is of itself scientific material. Therefore, even though we have to distinguish the processes of Jesus from those of the modern scientific mind, the great truths he taught must ever remain among the materials of scientific thinking on the subjects which he considered. Further, there is a finality and sureness about his teaching which have the true scientific ring. This is as far as possible

removed from mere dogmatism and conceit, but it carried in its first impression as it does today the confidence of authority. When assured conviction has come to the scientific mind there has been joyous confidence; when the stamp of finality has been fixed the general intelligence rests with tranquil assurance. The scientific certitude of Jesus is one of his enduring marks of greatness. Another thing which illustrates his scientific position is his impression of his teachings upon others. It has been told of Sir Humphrey Davy that on being asked what he regarded as his greatest discovery he promptly answered, "Michael Faraday." The band of disciples and the school of thought are a testimony to the greatness of any thinker. The great names of past and recent times which throng to the memory when this statement is understood, illustrate its truth beyond the need of argument. Judged by this test Jesus stands in the front rank of scientific thinkers. The acceptance and propagation of his teachings through nineteen centuries, the great souls in whom that acceptance and propagation have been as life itself,—these point back to the

Master as one whose contribution to enduring thought on the great themes which attracted him remains pre-eminent in power and worth. The best thinkers and thinking on those themes today owe alike their original impulse and their enduring authority to the mind of Christ.

The Ethical Phase

One of the most heartening indications of true progress in our modern life and thought is what is called "the ethical note." Of course it is not new. It is the glory of humanity that moral action is one of its most cherished and firmly entrenched principles. Again, this does not mean that there are no drawbacks and sad disappointments in the way of moral advancement. Alas! no. But without one-sided or exaggerated optimism we still can heartily rejoice in the continued and perhaps increasing insistence laid by modern leaders of thought and action upon the ethical principle.

Even some current tendencies in Christian thought which we must deplore as perversions and watch as perils reveal this

emphasis. The swing of thought from creed to conduct is one, and the subtle or open advocacy of the doctrine of salvation by character is another. Now there is no need to despise or even depreciate creed in the supposed interest of conduct. It is surely no difficult mental feat to establish a clear and consistent relation between what we ought to believe and what we ought to do. It is only half-thinkers, intellectual *poseurs*—of whom there is a multitude—who sniff at doctrine in their condescending laudation of conduct. The other error noted is far more serious, both in its meaning and consequences, since it cuts at the foundations of the Christian faith. Salvation by one's own goodness is certainly not a New Testament doctrine, but some who profess and call themselves Christians hold and teach it. Yet while we protest as strongly as possible against this fundamental and hurtful heresy, we cannot fail to recognize it as another decisive indication of the powerful hold which the ethical element in Christianity has taken upon the most recent thought.

Is Jesus Christ a potent force in the ethical life of the twentieth century? To

ask the question is to answer it. Only ignorance or wilful blindness could fail to return an affirmative answer. Indeed perhaps the majority of thoughtful observers (not necessarily professed Christians) would even go farther and say that by all odds the most important and fruitful force in morals today is Christ. For us, brethren, this view is a glorious and fixed conviction. This great assemblage of men and women is on this point both an unanswerable argument and an uplifting inspiration to itself. I am but your mouthpiece, speaking for yourselves to yourselves, when I remind you that your very thoughts of moral goodness are those which have been instilled into your minds as the teachings of Jesus; that your highest ideal of possible human virtue is the adorable example of your Lord; and that the best help and hope for righteousness of which you are conscious is the influence of Christ. And you are not alone. Great as you are, you represent here a greater multitude whom you have left behind to come to this annual gathering. And we Southern Baptists, in our millions, are but a division of the vast army of be-

lievers in Jesus Christ in all the world who accept his teachings as their guide, his example as their inspiration, his influence as their help in the moral struggle. These are the key words which describe and exhibit the force which Jesus is in the ethical life of today; his teachings, his example, his influence.

It is a well-beloved commonplace of ethical and religious assertion that the moral teachings of Jesus are the best the world has known. This is not to say that there are none good but his; nor that his precepts include every possible detail of conduct; but it is meant that in the principles of right action enunciated by Jesus Christ the highest and broadest level of moral teaching has been attained. In character it is correct and final. Instead of being judged by other standards it is the standard for judging others. In purity it is safe beyond the most prejudiced criticism. The sensuous and the selfish find no place in Christ's teachings. Appeal is ever made to that which is highest and holiest in man and in God. But we must go deeper than the exquisite surface of quality which appears in the ethical teachings of Jesus,

and get down to their inner character. There are two ultimates in these teachings: The ultimate of principle, and the ultimate of expression. Jesus touches the ultimate principle of righteousness in life when he refers it to the inner heart and motive, not to the outer deed and word. How he blighted with his infinite scorn the clean outside of the platter which inwardly was full of filth! the giving of alms that was a pretense; the tithing of mint that was an excuse for the neglect of weightier matters; the long prayers that were a cloak for covetousness and extortion. It is not the unwashen hands but the evil thoughts that defile; it is not merely the adulterous deed that is impure, but the purposed unchaste look; it is not the cruel act or word alone that hurts, but the unkind thought and feeling of the heart. Jesus did not originate this principle; it is as self-evident in morals as are some of the mathematical axioms, and it had long before found immortal expression in the saying, "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." But the emphasis, the clearness, the illustration which this eternal principle of conduct finds in the

teachings of Jesus fix it forever in human thought as an ethical ultimate. The other ultimate is that of expression. This appears in the great summary of the law which Jesus gave in answer to an inquiry: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart . . . and thy neighbor as thyself." In putting together these two precepts of the law of God to Israel, in summing up thus the message of the prophets to mankind, Jesus has given succinct expression to the thought of God on every possible phase of human conduct. Details indeed are not given—this was not the place for them—but the all-comprehensive and final statement of human duty is here. The mind of man can go no further in its expression. To love God supremely over himself and man equally with himself is the ideal and the limit of moral obligation. Every particular of ethical conduct is referable to this general law. It recognizes the true Source and the eternal Authority of morals in God; it exhibits the immediate field and scope of morals in our relations to each other; it defines the real motive and conquering force for morals as love. There is nothing more to be said.

But granting that the moral teachings of Jesus exhibit the highest character and rest upon the ultimate principles of right the question arises: Are these teachings applicable and practical amid our modern conditions? Here we are beset by the extreme of literalism on the one hand and by that of repudiation on the other. As usual, the truth lies between. Let it be borne in mind that the question is only possible as to a few details and not at all as to the comprehensive principle of the Master's teaching. Then in regard to such detailed precepts as may seem to be in our cases of doubtful applicability, several things must be said—though time does not admit of full discussion. Some of these particular precepts necessarily grew out of the circumstances and habits of the age in which Jesus taught, and therefore in the special form and expression of them may admit of some modification. But in all such cases the underlying principle of action or character involved is to be sought and applied. Another consideration is that in many cases our Lord evidently gave a partial or extreme statement of a neglected and important truth in order to give it much

needed emphasis, leaving the modifying condition to be sought either in other statements of his own or in the obvious converse of what he was at the moment stressing. Thus, when he says that in order to be his disciple one must "hate his father and mother," it is evident he meant no contradiction to the fifth commandment, but only to show with startling emphasis where supreme allegiance was owing. But making the fullest possible allowances for all these things, it remains that one of the most remarkable features of the moral teachings of Jesus is their wondrous applicability to all ages, races and times. Never has this truth received fuller illustration than in our own day of world wide propagation of the gospel.

It is another glorious commonplace of Christian thought to say that the exalted moral teachings of Jesus were most powerfully illustrated and are therefore for all time reinforced by his own example. The great impression made by his life upon his contemporaries, and the utter failure to discredit his character, are matters of record. The effect of that peerless character upon the imagination and love of men

throughout all ages since he lived is historic. The acceptance of the example of Jesus as a moral force in the modern world is easily seen by those who read and observe. Even among thoughtful unbelievers this is conceded. The oft-quoted passage from John Stuart Mill (Three Essays on Religion, page 253ff.) may well stand as one of the most telling and instructive of its kind. This great and representative skeptical thinker of the middle nineteenth century says: "The most valuable part of the effect on the character which Christianity has produced, by holding up in a Divine Person a standard of excellence and a model for imitation, is available even for the absolute unbeliever and can never more be lost to humanity. . . . And whatever else may be taken away from us by rational criticism, Christ is still left; a unique figure, not more unlike his precursors than all his followers, even those who had the direct benefit of his personal teachings. . . . When this preeminent genius is combined with the qualities of probably the greatest moral reformer, and martyr to that mission, who ever existed upon earth, religion cannot be

said to have made a bad choice in pitching on this man as the ideal representative and guide of humanity; nor, even now, would it be easy, even for an unbeliever, to find a better translation of the rule of virtue from the abstract into the concrete, than to endeavor so to live that Christ would approve our life." Other skeptics, who have admired the moral character and teachings of Jesus could be quoted in similar strain; while among believers there have been many to extol the example of the Master as a powerful force in the development of character. Contemporary Christian literature and even some occasional injudicious movements emphasize the great truth that the example of Jesus is still a live and potent force in the production and maintenance of the highest types of character known in modern life.

And so both his teachings and example sum and perpetuate themselves in the abiding and powerful influence of Jesus. Certainly that influence is not supreme in contemporary life—would that it were!—but it is potent and recognized. It appears in the individual Christian life and character. Though there is a multitude of unbe-

lievers and of unworthy nominal believers, it yet remains true that real Christians are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. It also appears in the immense quantity of good Christian literature that is still produced and read. This is said with full recognition of the greater immensity of bad and pseudo-Christian literature, which finds publishers and readers. Nor must we slight the organized and conventional methods by which the moral influence of Jesus is continued and enforced in our modern life. I mean the churches and their varied institutions and agencies. Say all that we sadly have to say about the neglect of worship, the decline of the power of the church, the disregard of preaching, the decay of family piety, and all the other talk of that sort, the fact remains that though not what they ought to be either in character or effect, none of these are dead things, and they still extend and enforce the moral influence of Jesus. In these and other ways that influence often receives some recognition even where it is ostensibly disavowed and denied. One may be an unbeliever, even a bad and blatant one, and yet such moral aspirations and senti-

ments as he has will plainly show traces of Christ. Often, too, persons who have no ethical principles of their own will admire those which in others exemplify the influence of Jesus. It is said that many of the grossest men, who swear at the church and deride all professing Christians, yet proclaim their admiration of Christ himself.

We must not omit one other important matter in this connection, and that is, our duty as Christians to assert and maintain the rightful place of Jesus in the ethical life of today. That duty is enforced upon us by two considerations which require fuller notice than can be given here: The current confusion as to moral standards, and the awful laxity in moral practice characteristic of our social life today. Taking Christ as the representative of God, and his summary and endorsement of the law of God as the ultimate authority in morals, the Christian has an advantage which it is his duty to press with all vigor and earnestness. An article by Mr. Harold Bolce in a recent number of *The Cosmopolitan Magazine* gives an appalling account of what is taught on this vital matter in some of our leading colleges and by

some of the most eminent teachers upon social and moral questions of our times. Making due allowance for whatever garbled and sensational statements may characterize the article, even if a part of what it says is true it is time for us Christians to take notice. Teachings repudiating the authority of God and Christ in morals, boldly rejecting the sanctity of the home and the ethics of marriage in the interests of pleasure, sneering at the foundations of Christian conduct, are, according to this writer, openly taught even in some institutions professedly Christian! This is no time for timidity and truckling to socalled "advanced thought," which is oftentimes a fine name for abominable principles. If we dethrone and repudiate the God who speaks in Christ as the supreme and ultimate authority in morals, what is left us? Confusion worse confounded! The easy-going theory of evolution—whatever is is right; the loose and lustful theory of pleasure—whatever we like to do is right; the narrow and selfish theory of utilitarianism—whatever seems best for the majority is right; the variable theory of custom—whatever happens to be common anywhere is right;

the gone-mad theory of individualism—whatever comes to me as right is right; the desperate theory where the extreme of despotism and anarchism meet—nothing is right and everything is wrong, and might is right. Take these, or Christ! Martineau has done valuable service to the cause of theistic ethics in his great work, *Types of Ethical Theory,* in which he trenchantly and profoundly criticizes all the erroneous and partial theories and founds the ethical principle in the nature of God as intuitively reflected in the moral nature and consciousness of man. To this we only have to add —and the addition is both rational and easy—that in Jesus Christ, His Son, God has spoken the authoritative word on moral good and moral duty. Be it ours to catch and exemplify the apostolic exhortation: "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

The need of taking and holding this high ground is terribly emphasized for us in the hideous immoralities which such teachings

as have been indicated condone and encourage as they exist among us. We need be no hopeless pessimists to open our eyes and see where the festering sores of our modern sins—which alas! are only ancient sins continued—appear. They infest our whole social life, polluting our pleasures, cankering our politics, corrupting our business, defiling our homes, ruining our youth, debauching our men and women! This is no time to listen to the voice of academic charmers charming never so wisely, when they insinuate into the minds of eager youths the insidious and all too welcome doctrines of living as they like. It is time to hold up the Christ as Guide of the conduct and Lord of the will. It is time for prophets in the pulpit and saints in the social life, for the voice that cries aloud and the salt that has not lost its savor.

The Spiritual Phase

There is general recognition of a decided recoil from the materialism which marked much of the philosophic and scientific thought of the nineteenth century. Not only in the theories of thinkers is this ap-

parent, but also in the less profound and more common ways in which the mind of an epoch expresses itself. That there are perils and evils even in such a healthy recoil as this may be granted without denial of its value upon the whole. The reaction may go too far, it may carry absurd and injurious excrescences upon its back, it may even trample some pearls of precious truth under the feet of its grossest perversions, or it may take aerial flights on gossamer wings of mysticism and be lost to the sight of ordinary mortals. Yet such distortions are common in the history of thought, and should not unduly distress us. Every extreme has its reaction to the opposite pole. Men will doubtless long continue to be foolish and say some foolish things even on the side of real truth and progress. But on the whole, this recurrence to the realm of the unseen and the spiritual from a too exclusive application to material facts and forces is a wholesome and hopeful phase of modern life and thought. That in the universe and in us which cannot be seen nor handled, weighed nor counted, but yet is, and is mighty, has come to be thought of once more as entitled to respect. This state

of things is opportune for the enforcement of religious truth; for the recalling of men's minds to the eternal verities which are in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore notice with gratitude and conviction the place of our Lord Jesus Christ in the spiritual life of today.

One thing of primary importance here, as well as of deep and apparently ever deepening interest, is the relation of Jesus to religious experience. It is almost startling, in view of conditions existing after the middle of the last century, to see how leaders of thought are beginning to recognize religious experience as a field for scientific induction and generalization. We greet the inductions with some degree of hope, but are naturally somewhat cautious yet as to the generalizations! But making every qualification which common prudence may suggest, we hail the entrance of science upon this task. Truth will bear investigation, and religious experience is certainly one of the most important possible departments of research. The inductions of science only confirm and emphasize what Christian thinkers already knew, and they leave no doubt that religious ex-

perience is a tremendous fact and force in the psychic and social life of mankind—a fact and force which the best science can not afford to ignore. One of the conclusions to which scientific investigation is surely pointing, and on which Christian conviction assuredly rests, is that the Source of true religious experience is our Lord Jesus Christ. We can not here go far in the discussion of this great topic. It has been taken up on the scientific side by such men as James, Starbuck, Coe, and others; and on the evangelical side by our own Dr. E. Y. Mullins in a luminous and spirited discussion in his *Why is Christianity True?* by H. W. Clark in his *Philosophy of Christian Experience,* and a number of others. Leaving out that wide field of general religious experience which the study of comparative religion and the future inductions of science may open up, and confining ourselves to distinctively Christian experience as described in the New Testament and in Christian literature, and as observed and exchanged in the fellowship of believers, we discover—as we should expect—both a remarkable variety of detail and an equally remarkable unity of origin. Conscious

Christian experience unanimously refers to Christ as its Source. Now this must not be regarded as a sort of necessary verbal truism only, for we must remember that in this deliverance of the believer's consciousness Christ stands for God—God made manifest as personal, historic, real. God comes into the Christian consciousness by the personal contact of the individual believer with Christ. In him the two sides of that contact unite; the divine origination, the human acceptance; in more familiar words, regeneration and faith. So far as the doctrine of the Trinity is concerned, that also finds splendid illustration in this meeting place of the soul with God. Paul gives the fitting expression when (Eph. 2:18), speaking of Jew and Gentile, he says: "Through him we both have our access in one Spirit unto the Father." Thus God in Christ, or Christ as God, is today as yesterday and forever the one Source of true religious experience.

The next step in unfolding the relation of Jesus to the spiritual life of our time brings us heart to heart with the sweet old gospel story. Even now, as when he first came into the world, and as he evermore

will be, is Jesus Christ the Saviour from sin. Fallen but not hopeless humanity heard of the Seed of the Woman who should bruise the serpent's head. Expectant prophecy dimly foretold of One who should be wounded for our transgressions, upon whom should be laid the iniquity of us all, whose soul should be made an offering for sin, who therein should justify many because he should bear their iniquities. An angelic evangel proclaimed the Christ as "Jesus" because he should save his people from their sins. The forerunner's voice acclaimed him as the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world. His own consciousness of the supreme purpose of his mission found utterance in the tremendous claims that the Son of Man had come to seek and to save that which was lost, that he would give his life a ransom for many, that if a man believed not in him he should die in his sins, that he was the way and the truth and the life and no man could come to the Father but through him. Apostolic preaching proclaimed that there is no salvation in any other, for there is none other name given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved.

Apostolic theology affirmed that there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus. Apostolic experience witnessed that it is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Apostolic vision described amid the glories of the heavenly state a Lamb on the throne, by whose blood the happy saints have been redeemed and purified. And before Revelation ends history begins, and through nineteen centuries has been borne constant testimony through thousands of hearts and lives that the way of salvation lies through Jesus Christ. The present age sets its seal upon this historic witness and adduces its millions to aver that today in every land and nation, be it to many or to few, the Christ is proclaimed and accepted still as the Saviour from sin.

Familiar, indeed, and dear to our minds and hearts, are the implications of this doctrine. Jesus saves us from the dominion and the penalty of sin. The cross purposes of our spiritual life, "the divided self," of which modern psychology talks, which Paul had so powerfully described

in the seventh chapter of Romans, we know only too painfully well. The sad scenes of falling short of our own possible best, the remorse and almost despair which sometimes assail us in view of our sins, the bitter consciousness of remembered fault, and the ceaseless fight against indwelling evil—all this we know. Ah, yes! And we know, too, how Jesus cares and helps! From that first glad hour when the sense of pardon overcame with resistless joy the deep grief of penitence, through all those ups and downs of the spiritual struggle till this very hour, we, my brethren, need no philosopher or scientist to tell us whence we got our help. Our business is to tell him. If we know anything at all we know that our highest inspiration to constant conflict with evil, our best help in whatever success we have had in the fight, and our comforting hope of final and enduring victory, are found in Jesus and in Jesus only. But under and over and all through this present help in our trouble with sin comes the precious doctrine of the Cross! It is that Jesus has offered a sufficient sacrifice for our sin. Not only its power in and over us is counteracted by his gracious

presence, but its dreadful penalties now and hereafter are met for us in his atonement. He died for us, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God. He died for our sins and rose again for our justification. His blood not only cleanses our consciences from the guilt of sin, but satisfied before God's judgment seat for that guilt. It is time, it always is time, to preach with sureness of conviction and experience the doctrine of the Cross. It is the world's greatest need in the twentieth as it was in the first century. If the Græco-Roman civilization, rotten at heart, needed the preaching of Jesus Christ, no less does our modern society, with all its abounding evils and crimes, need it. Sin is no more without penalty now than it ever was. "The soul that sinneth it shall die," is as true a dictum for the modern as the ancient world. We may change our language and our views of hell, but hell does not cease to be the inevitable and bitter penalty of a sinning and impenitent soul. We may shift the emphasis in our theology from the justice to the love of God, but God Himself does not cease to be just. We may vary our theory of the

origin of sin, but the fact of sin can not be averted by averting our looks from it. No less today than in all human todays, yesterdays and tomorrows, the fact and the penalty of human sin emphasize the need of a divine redemption; and for every today as it comes and goes that redemption is once for all provided in Jesus Christ. Red lined across the awful verdict of conscience and of God is written the gracious and sovereign pardon: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus."

Our final illustration of the place of Christ in the spiritual life of today is found in the glorious truth that he is the Giver of eternal life. Nothing has been more efficacious in redeeming thought from the deadly grip of materialism than the irrepressible yearning for immortality. To live, to live on, and to live better—what a deep desire! But who shall tell us whether? and how? In the face of this infinite longing philosophy becomes poetic, and science sentimental; but they bring us no certain word. It is still Jesus who speaks with sanity and with authority upon this momentous question of the real

and the enduring life of the spirit. And he speaks with a serene and firm confidence which invites and encourages our own calm and sure trust. His voice is the hope of the world. "Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, and believe in me"; "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." It was thus the early disciples understood and accepted him. For John tells us: "We have seen and bear witness and declare unto you the life, the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested unto us." And Peter writes: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away." And Paul declared that "the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord"; and further, that our Saviour Jesus Christ has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light

through the gospel. His word to them is their sure word to us.

We recall that on one occasion, after Jesus had spoken words hard to be understood, many that had believed him to be the Messiah, but were not prepared to take him at his full meaning, went back and walked no more with him. Then, turning to the Twelve he asked, "Will ye also go away?" Then Peter, answering for them and for all, even for us, said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast words of eternal life, and we have believed and know that thou art the Holy One of God." This is our case. To whom shall we go for assurance of life eternal? Not to the hard materialist who cynically rejects it; not to the frivolous sensualist who ignores and scorns it; not to the gloomy fatalist who will merely bow to the inevitable, whatever it may be; not to the philosophic poet who sings sweetly of it as a joy of the imagination; not to the rationalistic scientist who says that he can neither prove nor disprove it, and that a reasonable man may believe in it if he so chooses; no, not to these, but to Jesus Christ. His is still the voice of clear conviction: "I

am the way and the truth, and the life"; his is still the voice of tender invitation: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"; his is still the voice of the Good Shepherd speaking to reassure his timid but trusting sheep: "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish."

Thus, O Jesus, do thy people here assembled accept and hail thee, the same yesterday, and today, and forever! While tumultuous today crowds with stress and strain into yesterday, and swiftly gathering yesterdays lengthen into forever past, we come around again to face forever future; and still we see and salute thy commanding presence amid them all. "Thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail." O incomparable Teacher, we would think thy high and holy thoughts after thee! O matchless Guide, we would follow thy strong and confident leadership in pursuit of purity and righteousness! O divine Saviour, perfected through thy human suffering, we would trust thee alone for salvation and immortality! To thee we bring our baffled yet eager minds for truth on things beyond our ken, to thee we

bring our wayward and oft bewildered hearts for help in daily duty, to thee we bring our hurt and sorrowing souls for healing from sin and for hope of life evermore! Here at thy pierced and hallowed feet we rest until the day dawn and the shadows flee away!

II

WATCHMAN, WHAT OF THE NIGHT?

"The burden of Dumah. He calleth to me out of Seir, Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night? The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night: if ye will enquire, enquire ye: return, come." Isaiah 21:11, 12.

THIS is one of those obscure, yet striking passages of Scripture which awaken our curiosity and interest without entirely satisfying them. The meaning is not perfectly clear, and yet it is enough so to bring a valuable lesson to one who attentively considers the words. There is no fully satisfactory explanation. The passage is very brief, abrupt, and without logical connection with what precedes or follows. It is simply one among several brief prophecies, without date, and without logical order, which are grouped here in the book of Isaiah. We do not know what time or occasion brought forth the prophecy. We do not know where Isaiah was, nor who the enquirer was, nor

why the divine answer came in this form. Like many other dark passages of Scripture, its very obscurity awakens interest, and suggests a teaching of value. Dark Scriptures and dark providences alike, often bring us important and helpful lessons, even when we cannot penetrate their meaning or see plainly God's purpose in them. Yet this abrupt and obscure prophecy, when carefully studied, may yield us some lessons of hope and help as we trace its meaning. Let us observe the enquiry, the answer, and the admonition.

I. *The Enquiry.* The title is, "The burden of Dumah." The word "burden" as employed by the prophet signifies the message which God sends. It is equivalent to oracle, as employed in the ancient mythology, being the answer of the deity. But the word burden itself carries the thought of judgment, of punishment sometimes. It is the doom, as well as the revelation, sent of God through the prophet. This last shade of meaning probably does not appear here. It is simply the revelation of God to the prophet concerning Dumah. The word Dumah signifies silence, and is a poetic name for Edom, later known as

Idumea. It was the wild country to the South of Judea, inhabited by the descendants of Esau. The feud between the twin brothers had become historic in their descendants. There were frequent wars and there was much hatred, yet there were intervals of peace and many lines of intercourse between the two peoples. Dumah stands for heathenism, for hostility to Israel and to the God of Israel. It represents a proud, irreligious, cruel enemy to the Israel of God. Yet from such a source there comes a call to the prophet. "He calleth to me out of Seir." From the rocky fortress of Edom there rings out a cry to the prophet of God. From Dumah the silence is broken, and out of the dark there rings a cry of distress. The night has long settled down upon the people of Edom; gloom was about them. Their present was dark, and their future darker. The listening prophet, like a watchman waiting for the dawn, hears across the wilderness the call of neighboring heathendom as it rings in his ears, "Watchman, what of the night?" Perhaps the words, according to the late G. A. Smith, may be better rendered "what off of the night?" That is,

how much night remains? How long before day comes? When will better times of spiritual as well as temporal blessings come to us? Shall we be always enveloped in the cloud and darkness of irreligion and despair? Canst thou, O prophet, as the spokesman of the living God, give us a word of hope or of help in our long night? Something like this seems to be the meaning of this strange enquirer. Some, even in Edom, were looking for the day, and longing for it to come.

Is it so in our time, that in once far-off lands which now have been brought nigh through the wondrous development of transportation and trade there are some even in heathen darkness who are looking for the light? Through the lengthening years of missionary activity, amid all nations of the earth, frequent voices, like that of the unknown soul that calls from Seir, are heard. To alert and watchful Christian leaders the yearning cry of non-Christian nations has often made itself heard. Is our night to be forever? Is there not in your Christian truth some message of help and hope for us? Many instances have come from various ages and lands

through mission workers to show that time and again the yearning of the so-called heathen peoples has reached out toward the light of Christian truth. Sometimes the missionary and his people have been rebuked for their tardiness in bringing the gospel message. Time and again some weary and longing soul has said to the watchman, "Why did you tarry so long? If you had this message, why did you not bring it before? How long will it be until others come among our benighted people to bring the gospel message?" Even now, today, such cries go up from yearning spirits in those countries which have long been the scene of modern missionary endeavor. Word comes of multitudes in the far East, Japan, Korea, China, India, who are yearning for the light; who are asking, "Watchman, what of the night," or, "How much off of the night? How long until day dawns, and the light of the world shall illumine our land?"

We must not direct our thoughts to far off lands alone, but think of the heathen that are near us, nay, that are even among us. Dumah adjoined Judah. Edom was akin to Israel. The great worldly world

around us is of our own kind. The hopeless heart is found in the midst of modern civilization, and the yearning soul, unsatisfied with the things of earth, often cries out in its night and lonesomeness, "Watchman, what of the night?" This pleasure-crazed world, frivolous, self-gratifying, heartless, has in its throng sometimes a longing soul who cries out to some watchman for God, "How much off the night?" This materialistic, wealth-sodden world, groaning under its self-imposed burdens of business care, cannot always suppress its own groanings, and asks some watchman on the height of Christian hope and faith, "Watchman, how much off the night?" Is there not something better than to be busy for the accumulation of wealth? In the tangled web of our modern life, godless, gay, greedy, in the night of our hopelessness, our strain, our carking care, is there not some yearning cry to the enlightened soul who knows better? Is there not some voice of appeal to the watchful Christian spirit for a message of help and hope in the Dumah of the world's spiritual silence and darkness? Yes, we hear such voices now and then, and may be able to

say with the prophet, "He calleth to me out of Seir, Watchman, what of the night?" What answer shall we bring. Let us turn to our obscure prophecy again and find it.

II. *The Answer.* It seems strange, obscure, unsatisfactory, a double answer. It is incomplete. It does not bring all that was wanted, and yet it is an answer. The watchman said, "The morning cometh and also the night." Yes, the morning cometh. There is hope of a better day. The night will not endure forever. The coming glories of Messiah's reign in Zion may shine also upon Mount Seir. The spiritual blessings promised to ancient Israel may include Israel's neighboring foe, and bless even the vindictive and hostile tribe of her historic enemy. Even from Mount Seir one shall not call in vain. Hated Esau may become beloved, and the blessing denied to the ancestors may come upon his remote descendants. "The morning cometh." Even the Edomite may not despair. If he were in earnest, and sought the God of Israel, he should not seek in vain. This much the prophet watchman could assuredly say. So also in our modern conditions

the like promise may be cherished for the heathen abroad and the heathen at home. The Christian watchman may confidently say, "The morning cometh." A better day lies before us. There is hope of an obedient and prosperous church, glowing with spiritual life and rejoicing in fulfilled blessed hopes. There is hope of an evangelized world. Nearer than ever before in the history of Christianity is this an accomplished fact. Every nation and kindred and people is having the offer of redemption in Christ Jesus. The missionaries of the cross have gone into every land and laid down their lives among every people to make known the unsearchable riches of Christ. Christianity of the purest type has blossomed where foul orgies were practiced in the name of false religion. Idols have been thrown to the owls and the bats, and the cross of Christ has been raised up. Deserted temples in places have given way to Christian chapels, where crowding worshippers have come, and are coming in greater throngs, to hear the message of salvation. In many a place long closed to gospel light, the morning cometh.

Can we say that this is true in the

worldly world about us? Just now the ruin of war wastes the fairest parts of Europe. The storm and night lower above lands where the noblest institutions of Christianity have long flourished. It seems as if unbridled heathenism had broken loose in a world that ought to be Christian and at peace. Yet as there are voices to cry for help, there are also indications that the cry is heard. "The morning cometh." The unsatisfied heart of man calls out, and calls not in vain. We are told that in many of the lands afflicted by war there is a great turning toward God. There is recognition of a higher power than that of our vaunted civilization. There is a feeling of fault. There is a yearning for a restraining hand, a guiding wisdom, a purifying and uplifting presence. So may our twentieth century, still in its youth, see the turn toward a brighter day, and those who watch the signs of the times be able to assure the faint-hearted with the prophetic word, "The morning cometh."

Yet we know it is not all bright. The response of the watchman was, "Also the night." He must check undue confidence. From his post of observation he must

know that the forces of evil were not to be overcome in a day, nor could the best hopes of the best souls expect to find fruition in a night. If the morning is near there will be a short day and the night will come again. As night follows day, so trouble follows joy; so ignorance succeeds to enlightenment; so wickedness takes its turn with righteousness. No moral or spiritual victory is ever complete in this world. The shades must come along with the shines; the bitterness must be mingled with the sweets; "also the night." By such a figure the existence of both evil and good must necessarily be represented as alternating, but we know that they co-exist. The evil is along with the good. A little boy, bright with the hopes of youth, and beginning to look out upon life with some degree of thoughtfulness, was driving along the road with his father one day, a wise and good servant of God. The lad said, "Father, there is so much good in the world—I know there is bad too. Is it not true that for every bad thing there is also some good thing?" The more experienced father smiled rather sadly, and said to the boy, "Yes, but the evil preponderates."

The lad fell silent and pondered over the long word, whose meaning he did not exactly catch, and yet instinctively knew. So to all observers of the slow progress, at home and abroad, of Christian light and life and love, there must come the check even to their most ardent hopes of that word which says "also the night." It will not be full day for our poor, sinful world until he shall come whose right it is to rule, and to whom the sovereignty of the earth belongs. What shall be our attitude of mind and heart in view of the double certainty of morning and of night; of progress and yet of retard; of growing power, and yet of hindering weakness; of victorious truth, and yet of persistent error? If both morning and night are still to be our portion while we wait, in what spirit shall we abide? Let us go back again to our passage, and find our lesson.

III. *The Admonition.* More obscure yet seems the answer of the watchman. It seems even to bring a rebuke. To those who call out of Seir he answers, "If ye will enquire, enquire ye: return, come." What does he mean? Only that his message is not final; that day and night still must be.

No final day has yet arrived. Meantime the enquiring soul should not stifle its enquiries. The longing heart should not sink back into despair. The obscure and unsatisfactory answer of the watchman is meant to encourage the one who calls. It says, "Keep on asking. I may have a better message for you later. Come again. My answer is confessedly incomplete, but it is not final." Edom may have hopes along with the certainty of continued trouble, but it is her privilege to keep on asking if the night will not soon pass.

And this must also be the answer of the modern watchman. He must say to the voices which come from the heathen world around him, "If you will enquire keep on enquiring. I have a message for you. I cannot say everything will be bright all at once, but I can say it is worth your while to pursue your enquiries. You are directing your request in the right direction. If you wish to keep on asking, keep on." Here is your hope of an answer. God is not unmindful of your cry. From the holy hill of Zion there comes a word of reassurance to harsh and heathenish Seir. From the church of the living God in this mod-

ern age, with all her faults and failures, there must come to the sinful world which envelops her the watchman's answer. If you wish your answer upon the dark problems of sin, enquire of me. The enlightened Christian, not by any ambition or assumption of his own, but through the call of God and his enlightening grace, is still the waiting watchman to ring out the world's best hope. The church must purify herself and strengthen herself and devote herself yet more and more that she may be able, with serene confidence, to answer back to an enquiring world, "If ye will enquire, enquire ye." Before the problem the proper state of mind is not surrender, but continued enquiry. Before the problems of the ages, before the failures even of the best, the right attitude of soul for a world that needs help and hope is not one of abandonment, but one of continued effort to know. Through the historic channels of her knowledge of God, the church must still pour the refreshing waters of God's grace and knowledge upon a parched and weary world. Ezekiel's vision of the river that flowed from under Mount Zion and brought life wherever it

came is still apt for the needy world of today. The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is still the hope of mankind, and they who are seeking for the higher light must be pointed to him who is "the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world." We Christians still have a message. We must say to enquirers from all quarters, "If ye will enquire, enquire ye." Our light is not full, but we have it. Our problems are not all solved, but we have faith to wait, encouraged. With us you will find the best light and the best help. If you want knowledge of God and hope of eternal life, come, ask us.

And so the counsel grows emphatic. The watchman multiplies his words—"Return, come." There is an imperative that comes from possession of assured hope. There is an imperative that comes from the experience of a satisfied mind. He who can say "I know whom I have believed" can urge those who do not know to come and stand by him. The realization of a divine life in the heart is itself a plea to those who have it not.

So catching our inspiration from the ancient prophet, in his dealings with the

world of sin and doubt, and yet of yearning, that lay before him, let us ring out our answer, obscure and partial though it be; let us say to enquiring souls, whether in far distant lands, or nearer to us in the godless world that lies about us, If you wish the way of life, if you long for the hope of glory, if you are weary of the darkness and are yearning for the light, come to us. We have been appointed of God to direct wanderers to him. Not through any merit or worthiness of our own, but through God's grace upon us, we have been placed as watchmen to answer the calls of a needy world. Our message is one of hope. We can say to everyone who calls out of Seir, "The morning cometh," and though the night also must come, do not lose hope nor faith. Press your enquiries. A better day and its fuller answer will surely come. And so together let us watch and wait until the day dawn, and the daystar arise in our hearts.

"Watchman, tell us of the night,
What its signs of promise are.
Trav'ler o'er yon mountain's height,
See that glory beaming star.

Watchman, does its beauteous ray
Aught of hope or joy fore-tell?
Trav'ler, yes; it brings the day,
Promised day of Israel.

"Watchman, tell us of the night;
Higher yet that star ascends.
Trav'ler, blessedness and light,
Peace and truth, its course portends.
Watchman, will its beams alone
Gild the spot that gave them birth?
Trav'ler, ages are its own;
See! it bursts o'er all the earth.

"Watchman, tell us of the night,
For the morning seems to dawn.
Trav'ler, darkness takes its flight,
Doubt and terror are with-drawn.
Watchman, let thy wand'rings cease;
Hie thee to thy quiet home.
Trav'ler, lo! the Prince of peace,
Lo! the Son of God is come."

III

THE PASSING MATERIAL; THE ENDURING SPIRITUAL.

"Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath; for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment; and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my salvation shall be forever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished." Isaiah 51:6.

GOD'S thoughts are not our thoughts. They are so far above ours as even to seem to contradict them. Great souls upon great heights sometimes catch the thoughts of God and pass them down to those of us who linger and aspire amid the mysteries of the valley. In that wonderful poem *Abt Vogler,* Browning represents the old musician, in his meditations about his music, as looking up to the fulfillment of music and art and thought in a higher world. That which could find no perfect expression here should come to its fullness there. Speaking of the doubts and difficulties which men encounter in their

thoughts upon evil, the musing thinker says,

"But God has a few of us whom he whispers in the ear;
The rest may reason and welcome: 't is we musicians know."

The visions and thoughts of great souls in their raptures ofttimes bring us more truth than the painful processes of investigation and thought. Isaiah was one of those great spirits to whom God spoke in the ear, giving thoughts which transcend those which busy themselves merely with earth and time. In describing and rebuking the evil of his people in his time, the Prophet, taught of God, looks to better and higher things. The lines of light are shot across the shadowy background of present and pressing trouble. For the righteous and devout there is more to do than complain. If there are sad memories, there are also joyous hopes. If the people of God must look back to small beginnings and many trials, they must look forward to great accomplishments and enduring joys. Jehovah has comforted Zion, and in his dealings with her has made a place for joy and gladness. So the Prophet calls

upon the people, and speaks for God as he seeks their attention to the divine righteousness and the deliverance which shall be not for Israel only, but for all the people. In this rapture of glowing thought and hope occur the call and promise of this text.

It offers a contrast between the material and the spiritual, emphasizing the thought that the material shall pass away while the spiritual shall endure. The things which we see, and which seem to us most steadfast are the very things which shall pass away, while those spiritual influences, principles, and yearnings which are wholly invisible, always fitful and incomplete, are the things that shall forever endure. The glorious heaven and the solid seeming earth, with its inhabitants shall pass away, and the restoration of the stricken soul, and the establishment of moral goodness shall endure. This great prophetic thought finds rich and emphatic expression in the New Testament. Jesus said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." Paul reminds us, "The things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

In the second Epistle of Peter we read that "the heavens shall pass away, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, but we look for a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." Let us study the way in which God, through Isaiah, here gives expression to this profound and glorious thought. He calls upon us to observe the heavens and the earth with this thought in mind; that these great, visible realities shall pass away and the inhabitants of the earth likewise shall die, while on the other hand the enduring things shall be the work of salvation and the establishment of righteousness. In other words, it is a striking contrast between the instability of material and visible things and the stability of spiritual values.

I. *The Passing of the Material.* The Prophet's language is poetic; not scientific, in our modern sense. We have no need to apologize for the want of science in the great and spiritual teachings of the word of God. Its very value and permanence are found in the fact that the language and the thought of the Bible are those of the times in which its various books were writ-

ten. The eternal things which the book has to teach could only get into the thought of its own age by being adapted to the knowledge and ideas of the time. It is wonderful how, in doing this, the great writers of our Scriptures have yet succeeded in speaking to all ages, as well as to their own. The science of any age is more than half theory, which must pass. But truth is eternal, and moral principles are changeless. Our thoughts in this passage are directed to things as they seem. In bidding us look to the heavens and the earth the Prophet does not teach us astronomy or geology, either of his own time or of ours. He only bids us look with the eyes of common man upon the things which seem to be most enduring, in order that we may contrast these in their decay with the things that really last. Naturally the glowing heavens above are put in evidence as an instance of the seemingly permanent that must sometime pass away. The shining stars of night, the glowing sunshine by day, the infinite blue expanse above and around, all these are the very symbol of the constant, enduring order of the mighty universe. Is it possible that these things

shall pass away? Is it mere poetic exaggeration to say that these shall vanish away like smoke? The best and most daring thinking of our modern times looks back to a time when the visible heavens were not, and afterward to far distant ages when perhaps they shall be no more. But whether it be the suggestion of Biblical poetry, or the thought of speculative science, the passing of a universe is a possibility of the imagination. Daring as it is, the illustration is not extravagant. Whether literal or metaphoric, the language conveys the great lesson intended. The universe as we know it, is subject to change and decay.

Next our thought is brought down to earth. We speak of it as the solid earth, and a great poet has made one of his characters call it "thou sure and firm set earth." And so it seems to us in the ordinary course of things. Yet the deductions of science bring the earth also into the category of perishable things. And an occasional tremor here and there reminds us that our world is not so firm as it would seem. Nay further, the poetry of the passage challenges us to consider how the

earth does wear away like a garment. The perishable fabrics with which we clothe ourselves soon yield to the wear of time, and so this ancient earth sometime shall show its age and wear out. Such an event seems so distant as to be impossible, but the very strength of the contrast is its emphasis. That which seems to us most enduring and least likely to decay is the very thing brought into the comparison. If anything can be expected to stand the shock of catastrophe, or last through the ravages of time, it would seem to be the solid earth on which we stand and think. But no, even this at last shall yield and somehow pass into something else.

The remaining element of the comparison is more familiar to our experience and thought, and does not startle us. "The inhabitants of the earth shall die in like manner." This is no strange thought to us. When it comes to living things, especially human beings, we more readily see and accept the truth as to their perishable nature. The wondrous revelations of geology have made us familiar with many forms of extinct life. Strange creatures that peopled this earth in far gone epochs

fill us with wonder. The dawn and development and decay of life on the earth should remind us that the present forms of life need not be any more permanent than those which have passed away. The language, however, has in mind human life. the existing social order, the intercourse of men with each other. History and observation show us how these change and pass. Generation has followed generation until we reach back to some dim vestiges of prehistoric man, and we know beyond doubt that the people of our earth are a passing show. Constant decay is the history of the human race. Of course there is equally constant renewal so far, but we need not be sure but there shall be a time when renewal shall cease, and decay be final. The story of the passing throng is the lesson we need to lay to heart.

"Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see;
O Thou who changest not, abide with me!"

II. *The Permanency of the Spiritual.* Amid universal decay and wreck is there anything that shall stand? The best thought, the firmest faith of mankind find

rest in the conviction that behind the passing things that we know there is some great unseen force, or power, or being, that forever was and forever will be. The great thought of God as Creator and Sovereign rises like a mighty mountain of silent, solemn, enduring peace. The inspired poet has laid hold of this great truth and has written in fadeless form these consoling words: "And, thou, Lord, in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the works of thy hands: They shall perish; but thou continuest: And they all shall wax old as doth a garment; And as a mantle shalt thou roll them up, As a garment, and they shall be changed: But thou art the same, And thy years shall not fail."

The thought of our own passage is that not only God, in his own greatness and glory abides, but that in the work he does for and in men, and in the essential moral grandeur of his nature, he abides forever. Amid the change and decay of all visible things we hear the voice of him who says, "My salvation shall be forever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished."

We need to think upon these words "my

salvation shall be forever." The meaning is not only that God's power to save men shall stand, but that the actual result of his saving power shall remain. The effected deliverance of men through the working of God's grace shall be forever assured. It is evident that the word salvation is here used in its higher spiritual sense. Sometimes in the Old Testament it refers to deliverance from danger and destruction, but often means the rescue of the soul from sin and its consequences. That higher meaning is almost exclusively that of the New Testament, and is doubtless the idea of this passage. What God does and accomplishes in the actual deliverance of men from the power and consequences of sin is here declared to be permanent. Here we must take in the great redemption through Jesus Christ, which has been unfolded in the new dispensation. The prophets of the old covenant dimly foresaw what the Christians of the new order more fully perceived and enjoyed. God's salvation in the fullness of its effect is embodied in the cross of Christ and its power as the saving force for mankind. We pass here the doctrinal aspect of the great subject of

salvation. May our minds be full of the thought itself, that God, in the person and sacrifice of his well beloved Son, has provided a way of deliverance for mankind from the blight, the defilement, the guilt and the penalty of sin. These old familiar ideas are filled with glory and joy. They are the divine excellence of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In human life and experience they are the reality and the joy of salvation. In human history the saving of men from sin through the progress of Christian faith has been the hope of the world and so remains. Amid all changes God's love in Christ, saving men from sin, abides a constant spiritual force. Though the heavens pass and the earth be blotted out, God's saving grace, working out in the lives and hearts of men, shall endure forever. This gospel has been much neglected, ofttimes dishonored, alas! frequently derided, but it abides the one glorious and blessed power for good in all the changing sad story of human fault and decay. More steadfast than the earth beneath our feet, more abiding than the shining stars above us, the saving love of God in Christ persists amid the rise and fall of empires, the

coming and going of human generations, as the fadeless hope and inspiring comfort of human souls.

It is not only the spiritual deliverance from sin as an effect of the cross, but also the moral change effected therein which abides forevermore. The word is, "My righteousness shall not be abolished." We do well to interpret righteousness here in a broad sense. It is not specifically the personal righteousness of God, but rather the righteousness which he enjoins upon men and works out in them as the effect of his redeeming grace. It is the moral character of mankind, as accomplished and assured and active in man, the result and expression of his salvation. This idea of righteousness, like that of salvation itself, is more fully brought out and explained in the New Testament, but it is by no means foreign to the conceptions and expressions of the Old Testament writers. Looking at the matter from the individual point of view we can say that the saved soul—personality and consciousness—persists in its righteousness. The purified, self-conscious struggle on through life, amid temptations, defeats, and failures, until it becomes the

perfection of human goodness allied with the thought and hope of immortality, is suggested. The great doctrine of immortality, as taught in the gospel, carries with it the thought of the perfect soul living forever. No imagination nor faith can be so thrilling as this. To live, and to live right, and to live forever. This is the supreme human ideal. To have perfected within us the divine plan by the divine power, to realize in an endless state of being the full ideal of God's own idea of human purity and perfection is the glorious hope held out to us, at least by suggestion, in the enduring righteousness of God in man.

And still a wider view is brought to our thought in the passage already quoted from the second Epistle of Peter. "We look for a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." A social order in which the righteousness of God shall be the outstanding and victorious fact is here held out to us. As a matter of fact, all through the tragic story of Israel's failure, and even through the centuries of Christian struggle, the divine idea of righteousness has been moving. Somehow it has never passed out from the minds and

hearts of men. The sad pages which describe human failure have been lit with the light of human triumph over the evil. The deathless yearning of mankind for righteousness in heart and home and community is written indelibly upon the story of human progress. The beckoning hand of God has been summoning through the ages to a higher reach and a firmer settlement of his righteousness in the hearts and the institutions of men. The very persistence of this idea of righteousness through so many drawbacks, disappointments and defeats carries with it its own hope of ultimate triumph. The Christian heart hopefully embraces this glorious prospect and refuses to yield to despondency and despair. It sings with Faber:

> "For right is right since God is God,
> And right the day must win;
> To doubt would be disloyalty,
> To falter would be sin."

When the supreme effort of the human spirit, both in its personal and in its social life, shall reach the beautiful plan of God, and shall last in that attainment through all eternity, the fullness of promise con-

tained in this passage, and others like it, shall be found.

"Therefore to whom turn I but to thee, the ineffable Name?
Builder and maker, thou, of houses not made with hands!
What, have fear of change from thee who art ever the same?
Doubt that thy power can fill the heart that thy power expands?
There shall never be one lost good! What was, shall live as before;
The evil is null, is naught, is silence implying sound;
What was good shall be good, with, for evil, so much good more;
On the earth the broken arcs; in the heaven a perfect round."

IV

GOD AND HIS PEOPLE.

"The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge." Ps. 46:7.

GOD has always had his people in the world. In the accounts of Scripture this great fact stands out prominent and distinct. During those obscure times before the Flood the record speaks of "the sons of God" as distinguished from others. The story of Noah and the preservation of him and his family teaches the same great truth. Later, the call of Abraham, and the blessings which came to his descendants confirm this teaching. Psalmists and prophets through Israel's later history present in many forms and figures the touch of God with his own. The coming of our Lord and Saviour, and his proclamation of the kingdom of God, and his founding of the church of the living God, present the New Testament phase of this great and glorious

truth. The history of Christianity through all the ages shows how in many parts, in many races, and to thousands of individuals the realness of God in his relation to his own has been manifested.

The dealings of God with his people in any one age and time are instructive and encouraging to those who believe in God through all ages and times. In this great psalm the nearness of God to his own in times of trouble and distress is devoutly and vividly set forth. These words have spoken to the hearts of God's people in times of trial through all the centuries. They lose none of their freshness and force in the message they bring to us in the great epoch of the world's history in which we live and act. The great questions for our day, and for all days are: Is God real? Is God accessible? Has he ever unmistakably made himself known to men? Has anybody truly found him? To these questions the experience of the faithful has in thousands of ways expressed the great affirmative answer. No expression of the answer can surpass in grandeur and in simplicity the devout utterance of this text. We notice that its two members, after the manner of the

Hebrew poetry, present the same great thought, from different points of view and in varying language. The assured conviction that God is, and that he is the rewarder of those who diligently seek him, in these words reaches a calm of confidence and a joy of hopefulness which cannot be surpassed. An analysis and minute study of the text may serve to freshen and emphasize the blessed truth which it brings. The two members of the verse bring to us the reality of God's relation to his people, first, under the aspect of God's grandeur and greatness; and secondly, under that of his condescension, his willingness to come into personal touch with individuals. In each clause God is named by the title expressive of one of these two thoughts; and in each a profound statement asserts the reality of God to his people. Let us study in detail the noble words which bring us this great truth.

I. The Lord of Hosts is With Us.

1. *The Title.* In Scripture God is revealed by his titles as well as by doctrinial statements concerning his nature, or by descriptions of his acts. No title can give us

a higher conception of the power and glory of God than this which we so often meet, "The Lord of Hosts." Bible readers know well that when in the English version "The Lord" is written, the name of the Lord is printed in small capitals. It stands for the name Jehovah. Bible students also know well that this is not the correct writing of that great name. The ancient Hebrew was written without vowels, and this name of God stands in the Hebrew manuscripts only with its four consonants JHVH. These came to be called, The Holy Four Letters. The vowels belonging to them were lost because through reverence the Jewish teachers of the law never pronounced the name, but in reading or repeating always used another word, "Adonai," "Lord." In order to insure that this name would be pronounced instead of the other, they gave the vowels belonging to that. Modern scholars who have not accepted the scrupulous reverence of the old Hebrew teachers have not been able to agree upon the reconstruction and right pronunciation of the word. Many take Yahweh as the most probable writing of the name, but for us Jehovah has come to be accepted, and we

understand that it is the great name of the God of Israel. The meaning of this name, and the thought which it brings are of more importance to us than its form. It is generally agreed to be expressive of the self-existence of God. In support of this view reference is made to God's revelation of himself to Moses at the burning bush. When Moses demurred against accepting the divine mission to Egypt, and asked what he should call God, the answer came, "I AM THAT I AM." The name Jehovah is thus associated with the word for being. It is equivalent to saying "God is." He was not born, he was not brought into existence, he was not made, he did not in any way come into being or begin to exist. He simply is. This great conception of God is the starting point at once for philosophy and for religion. The intellect takes refuge in a personal self-existence and the longing soul finds comfort in a being so defined. In this name of God we find the ultimate origin, the starting point for life and thought. It thus brings to us the great Force, the great reality that lies back of all things.

The lonely grandeur of such a being as

Jehovah is offset by the rest of the designation when he is called Jehovah of hosts. Alone and unique he is and ever must be in the essence of his being, but he is not without companions and associates. The hosts or armies intended in this description are doubtless meant to include all the intelligent and spiritual beings who obey Jehovah and execute his will. The declarations of Scripture are clear as to the general fact that there are such beings, and some glimpses of their nature and work are afforded us. Much is left to imagination, and if we are careful to distinguish what we imagine, or what others have imagined, from what is actually revealed in the word, it may not be amiss for us to think of that great multitude of pure and mighty and happy beings who surround, accompany, obey and worship the Lord God Almighty. He is the sovereign and center of all forces and powers who understand and execute his will. Prophets and poets and devout thinkers of every age have revelled in the holy imagination of all these glorious spiritual orders and ranks who acknowledge the sway of Jehovah. To the ancient oriental mind more vividly than to our own,

the imagination of a sovereign, in his splendor, with thousands of living subjects joyfully hastening to fulfill his high behests makes appeal. This is the figure of our text, a glorious king at the head of his armies.

2. *The Statement.* How simple it is. "Jehovah of hosts is with us." Two thoughts are involved in this simple yet profound statement. He is with us as a reassuring and sustaining presence. It is not by sight or touch, but in the spiritual manifestation of himself and the answering spirit of man. God is with his people externally in his word, in his church, in his works. The sense of the divine presence as Jehovah of hosts is made vivid to the faith and imagination of his people in their moments of high and devout worship, of holy ecstasy, of rapt and prayerful meditation. It is to be feared that we do not rise to our privilege here, and use our regulated imagination in the endeavor to make real the presence of the Lord. The wonder and awe, the rapture and joy of realizing the presence of the Sovereign of the universe can never be expressed. Not all believers have been able to rise to this height, but some-

times to the commonest of us some glimpses of this glory may be granted while we pray and think.

The other great thought wrapped up in the simple statement is that God is on our side. He is with us in our struggle. This perhaps was what the inspired poet had chiefly in his mind. God's people are arrayed against evil. The forms and forces of evil are countless and malignant. Sometimes they seem unconquerable. Sin within the soul, and sin abroad in the earth; sin in the individual and sin in the multitude; this is our enemy. Who can estimate the number and the might of the forces of evil? Those who struggle against them are often downhearted. They feel discouraged, overwhelmed, undone. And when we think how many there are to do wrong, and how few there seem to be to do right, our hearts grow faint and our souls are weary with the long campaign. Sometimes it looks as if a handful are struggling all in vain to keep righteousness in the earth and hope alive in the human breast. So many times the church militant has been defeated, ambushed, borne down by superior forces, driven into captivity in the wilderness in

disarray, confusion and panic. It is for these this mighty word is spoken, "The Lord of hosts is with us." The Almighty and Eternal one who cannot die, with his countless armies of might and power, is on our side. The end of our warfare may not yet be near. The final triumph may yet linger through the years. Crushing defeats for some battalions here and there may yet be the mournful experience of God's struggling church. But his people, in their age-long and not yet ended conflict should hear this reassuring word that has rung out for the cheer and comfort of God's people above many a hard fought battle, "Jehovah of hosts is with us."

At the battle of Crecy we are told the forces under the Black Prince were terribly pressed by a charge of the French cavalry, and some of the prince's officers, taking alarm, speeded to the king with the message that his son was hard pressed, and begged for his assistance. The king asked, "Is my son dead, or so wounded that he can no longer fight?" "No," was the reply, "But he needs your help." "Return," the king replied, "to those that sent you, and tell them not to send to me as long as my

son lives. I command them to let the youth win his spurs." Upon that the forces of the prince charged again and a great victory was won. The presence of the king and his reserve forces gave courage to those who fought the fight. Even so we may not understand why our King does not come, but he is on our side, and his armies are under his command. The fight is on, the triumph awaits those who trust and take courage from the presence of "the Lord of hosts."

II. The God of Jacob is our Refuge.

1. *The Title.* The change from "Jehovah of hosts" to "the God of Jacob" is significant. It brings us from the height of heaven and its glory to the depth of earth and its need. It is a wonderful thing that the same great being who is known as "Jehovah of hosts" is equally well known as "the God of Jacob." The one view presents him in his almightiness, the other in his approachableness. The King of celestial armies is the God who is nigh to a needy man. There is no contradiction here. It is only two views of the same God. If we did not have this conception

of God to balance the other we should think of him as far out of our reach; as removed in his lofty splendor from any approach of ourselves. But happily for us, in the very same stanza of this great poem both these thoughts are presented and put together. It is marvelous that "Jehovah of hosts" should also be "the God of Jacob." Who was Jacob, and what was his history? He was a man, an average man, a weak and sinful man. He was not an Enoch, who walked with God and was too good for earth. He was not an Abraham, the father of the faithful, and the friend of God. He was not even an Isaac, gentle, pure, meditative and devout. No, he was Jacob, the supplanter, whose very name was a badge of disgrace. He was a liar and a cheat. He was one who defrauded his brother and then ran away from just, though vindictive, anger. He was a poor, fallible, unworthy, sinful man. And God lets himself be called "the God of Jacob." If he was Jacob's God he can be mine. If he was not ashamed to let himself be known as belonging to Jacob, he cannot disown even me. I need not confess to Jacob's sins, but I must needs confess my own. I may not

be a cheat or a coward, but in my own way I am a sinner like Jacob. If God could be Jacob's God he can be my God. I am not far off, if at all, out of Jacob's class. "Jehovah of hosts" can come down to even such a one as Jacob, and that means me.

Nay, more than this. Jacob was not only an average sinful man, but he was a man in trouble and need. There is evidence that he felt his sin. There is token of one who earnestly sought forgiveness both of his brother and of his God. Certainly in his loneliness and exile, accompanied by his crushing consciousness of wrong-doing, he was a man in sore straits, and needy,—Oh, so deeply needy,—of divine help and strength. To such a man God comes. We think of that wondrous vision when Jacob was alone in the wilderness, weary with his journey, his head resting upon a stone for a pillow. But the ladder reached unto God, and bright messengers passed up and down to tell him of God, whose voice was borne to him with a promise. "The God of Jacob" is a God who helps and reassures the needy sinner at his place of deepest need.

Again we think of Jacob as he wrestled

with God at the Brook of Jabbok. Here was, if possible, a yet sorer trial. The fear he felt now was not for himself alone, but for his family and dependants. The suggestive story of that night-long struggle has engaged the devout interest of believers in all ages. "The God of Jacob" is a God who lets a man wrestle with him in prayer and though he may delay the answer and smite the penitent as a reminder of his weakness, the prayer is heard and answered. "The God of Jacob" is a prayer-hearing God, and that is the God whom we need.

Once more we think of the aged patriarch, when, after long years of experience with God, he recounts his own sins and the unfailing mercies of God to him. And he declares that none of the things which God had promised him had ever failed. Admitting his unworthiness, and deploring it, he rejoices in God as one who kept his covenant. Yes, "the God of Jacob" is a promise-keeping God, and that is the God we need. Paul tells us in a great passage of his writings that "all the promises of God are Yea and Amen in Christ Jesus." God, in later days, sent his Son into the

world to renew the promises made unto the fathers, and to fulfill them in part, and to remain the final and perfect pledge of all God's gracious words of promise to mankind.

2. *The Statement.* "The God of Jacob is our refuge." This sin-forgiving, prayer-hearing, promise-keeping God, this God of Jacob, is our refuge. What is a refuge? A place to run into and be safe; a place easy to reach, and strong to protect; a place where weariness is relieved, and wounds are cured, and enemies are defied. God in Christ is our refuge in temptation; when the forces of evil from within and without come not in mighty array, but in subtle suggestion; where the scene of conflict is not the great field of the world but the unseen recesses of the tried and lonely soul. He who permitted Jacob to wrestle with him welcomes us to a similar test of his willingness to help. God in his Holy Spirit, the Comforter, is our refuge in sorrow and trial. When afflictions sore and heavy befall us and all our comforts flee, we shall find in our thoughts of him, in our approach to him, that peace and strength which cannot be found elsewhere, in our

sincere prayers "the peace of God which passeth all understanding" may guard our minds in Christ Jesus.

And last of all, in view of life's threatened and speedy close, in view of our certain departure sometime from this earth, in view of that last struggle that awaits us all, that mystery of an ended life and an unknown beyond, may "the God of Jacob" be our refuge. No word but his has come from the great gloom out yonder. No hand but his has been reached across the great fixed gulf of death. No light but his shines on that dark and lonely pathway where the soul must go to meet its destiny. But the God of Jacob is our refuge in Jesus Christ our Lord. He hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

A refuge, of course, implies one who seeks it. The thought of a refuge is but half a thought until it is sought and found. A Saviour would be only a potential Saviour unless sinners sought and found him. "The God of Jacob" would be but a nominal refuge unless poor souls, like Jacob, ran to him for protection and help. Surely our sense of need, our kinship with Jacob

in his human weakness should lead us to seek the refuge which he found, and rise from our individual needs and cares to those of all the church universal and of all the human race. In the mighty conflict with sin we should lift our hearts and thoughts to confidence and hope when we remember that "Jehovah of hosts is with us." For each and for all this glorious word of promise abides. May it comfort our hearts and strengthen our minds as we think upon it.

V

THE SURE PROMISES OF GOD.

"For how many soever be the promises of God, in Him is the yea; wherefore also through Him is the Amen, unto the glory of God through us." 2 Cor. 1:20.

THE very interesting and somewhat difficult passage of which this text forms a part affords us one among many examples of how human conduct illustrates by contrast the dealings of God with men. The point at issue between Paul and his critics is whether the apostle has been false and fickle in regard to his promises. In repelling the charge and justifying his change of purpose he declares that his character and conduct as a preacher of the truth of God, and the effect of the preaching of himself and his colleagues, were such as to be out of harmony with the accusation of his enemies. He was not a man of selfish aims and fickle purposes, and as a preacher of the truth in Jesus Christ he did not deal in wavering un-

realities but in steadfast verities. He was not a "yea and nay" man, saying yes and meaning no; or saying yes and no in the same breath. The gospel he preached was not a "yea and nay" gospel, but was a grand "yea"—a firm and steadfast affirmation of divine blessing in Christ. For in fact no matter how many are the promises of God they are all "yea" in Christ. He is the divine pledge of their fulfillment. Moreover it is through Christ that our own hearts are enabled to say the "amen" to those promises as they are fulfilled. Christ is from God's side a pledge, and on our side an assurance of all God's promises. This is the rich meaning of the text. All the promises of God are confirmed to us in Christ.

I. *Multitude of the Promises.* Suggestively does the expression "how many soever" indicate the richness and variety of the divine promises. It is incidental to the main thought, but is clearly involved. The statement is without qualification or exception—"as many as there are." No one who attentively reads the Bible can fail to observe what a large share of its sacred pages is devoted to the promises of God.

The general character of the divine promises is described for us in 2 Peter 1:4, where they are called the "exceeding great and precious promises," and in the context their quality and purpose are further made known. One would have to search the Scriptures through to gather in any catalogue these wonderful and glorious promises of God to men. It would be far from our present purpose to attempt such a list and classification, but it may not be amiss to suggest some of the groupings under which the promises might be gathered. They take a very wide range from those given to individuals out to those which include the whole race of mankind. If we think of special classes of weak and suffering men who are helped and cheered by the promises of God, we shall find that they come to childhood and old age, as well as to the burdened and tempted, who strive with life's problems and troubles between its extremes. There are promises to the tempted that they will be sustained, or that the way to escape shall be found. There are promises to the weak, who may take refuge in the divine strength, which is made perfect in weakness. There are

promises to those who seek after God that if with all their hearts they truly seek Him they shall not seek in vain. Those who, through conscious weakness and many failures strive to practice godliness, are pointed to the victory that God's grace will gain in and through them. And there comes to those who persevere through every kind of trial, even unto death itself, the gracious reassurance of the crown of life. The heavy laden are invited to lose their burdens in the presence of the comforting Christ. The sick and sad are told of the everlasting love that makes all things work together for good to those who love God. To all mankind at large the fadeless hope of eternal redemption through Jesus Christ is stretched out with loving invitation and constraining counsel. To the Redeemer Himself, as the leader and representative of his redeemed, the promise of ultimate victory is assured. In the second Psalm the Messiah is bidden, "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession."

A brief survey like this can but touch the

border of the great and glorious plentitude of the promises of God. We can thus choose only a few illustrative examples from the infinite range, and boundless variety, and the numberless multitude of the divine promises. Suited are they to every care, every need, every man, woman and child in all the world in all time. They tell of good on earth, and of the unspeakable glories of the life to come. Yet are they in nowise too many or too great for God to make and keep. He has not overtaxed Himself to give these promises, nor are they beyond the easy sweep of His power to fulfill. But for our sake he has given sure and strong confirmation, that even in the stumbling weakness of our half-faith "we might have strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us."

II. *The Pledge of the Promises.* In His goodness and mercy God often adds a pledge, a seal, a confirmation, even to His own word. In a very striking and beautiful way is this confirmation added in the present instance. All the promises of God, no matter how many they may be, are confirmed to us in Christ. He is the unique

and exalted pledge of every fulfillment. In Him, on God's side, is the "yea." He is the perfect and divine affirmation, added to all the promises of His Father. This does not mean that anything was needed to bind God to the fulfillment of his gracious promises to men, or that any pledge can make them more sure than His simple word, but it means that in fact, the coming and character and work of Christ do make, for all who receive Him, the strongest possible pledge of God's faith in all His promises of blessing to mankind.

We might say that, logically, Christ constitutes this pledge. He is the Son of God, and the great fact that He comes as the highest gift of God to man includes every smaller gift. "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things." His advent was a promise, and became a fulfillment, and so He carries in Himself the pledge of final and complete fulfillment of all the manifold promises of God.

Looking at the matter from a slightly different point of view, we may further say that Christ is historically and actually

a pledge of the promises of God. His appearance on earth, His beautiful life, the character He displayed, the work He did, the gracious words that He spoke, the crowning self-sacrifice on Calvary, the glorious resurrection from the dead, all join to give token of God's powerful presence and reassuring revelation of Himself among men. Jesus of Nazareth was in all that concerned the moral and spiritual nature of man the most important person that has ever appeared in human history. His transcendent personality, His faultless character, place Him at the head. He was the best of all men. He lived the best life. He loved the most. He was humanity's beau-ideal. He was personalized truth. He said, "I am the truth." He was embodied knowledge. He said, "I am the light of the world." He was realized redemption. He said, "I come to seek and to save that which was lost." He was perfectly unselfish, even unto sacrifice. He said, "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." In rising from the dead he put the final seal upon all else that he was and did. That great

fact was accepted by the early Christians as the final seal of God's redemption in Christ. Paul has boldly said, "If Christ be not risen from the dead your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins." Throughout all subsequent history the living Christ has been in the lives of believers the reassurance of all that God has promised in Him. Thus through all the range of His earthly experience, and by His ever living to intercede with God for us, Jesus abides forever the living and mighty pledge of all the promises of God. This is from God's side. It remains that we shall think of our side also, and see how Christ, in and with us, stands related to the promises of God.

III. *Our Reassurance of the Promises.* This appears in the words "wherefore also through Him is the Amen, unto the glory of God through us." God's yea is spoken down through Him to us. Our amen is spoken up through Him back to God. To all His promises, God, in Christ, adds the pledge. For all these promises, we, in Christ, find reassurance and confidence. The grace of God speaking to our hearts says, "Yes, my promises are good." The trusting heart, taking Christ as Saviour,

looks up to God and answers back, "Amen, the promises are sure for me." When we believe in Christ we take all that He brings with Him into our hearts and lives. Thus experimentally He becomes to His own the reassurance of all that God has promised. This is a matter of deep personal experience. The Psalmist prayed, "Show me a token for good." In Christ and the believer that prayer is fully and finally answered. The life of faith in Christ is the life of confident hope with regard to all that God has said He would do for the trusting soul. It is the brave, the true, the beautiful life. It depends not on the changing things of time and humanity, but on the changeless word of the eternal God. Even in Him who "in the beginning was the Word, and was made flesh and dwelt among us." Accepting Christ with a warm and living faith, we enter the sunlit region of safe and peaceful confidence in all the exceeding great and precious promises of God. Here while we wait and strive, every time we think of a promise, and think of Christ, our hearts, through Him, say "amen, it is true for me." "Amen" is the word with which we have learned to end

our prayers. Though often we say it without realizing its full meaning, it helps us now and then to remember that it is the devout expression of our confidence in God. The little word is itself an affirmation on our part, as well as a petition, that what is asked may be made secure.

The rapt seer upon Patmos, looking upon the strange and yet glorious visions which were vouchsafed to him, saw one wherein a great multitude, which no man could number, stood before the throne and before the Lamb as they worshipped God, and they said, "Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen." This ascription of praise begins and ends with "amen." It is a suggestion of what goes on in the redeemed people of God toward the final consummation. The church of the redeemed on earth joins with the church triumphant in glory, in sending up through Christ her joyous amen to all the accepted promises of our God.

O weary heart, puzzled mind, fainting and doubtful spirit, look to all the promises of God, no matter how many they are,

in all their varied adaptation to every human need. These are yours. You have not yet reached to their fulfillment. Like the saints of old, you salute them from afar. But yet while you wait in your weakness and doubt, God speaks His everlasting "yea" even to you. And you, in Christ your Lord, may be able, with all confidence and hope, to answer back "Amen."

VI

THE PARABLE OF THE LOST AND FOUND

"Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. And he spake this parable unto them." Luke 15:1-3.

THESE introductory verses to the 15th chapter of Luke give us the occasion of that gracious and wonderful teaching which stands out so prominently and grandly among the utterances of our Lord. The self-righteous formalists objected to the friendly and familiar intercourse which our Lord granted to publicans and sinners. It is not difficult to see their point of view, though it is impossible to approve of it. The class represented by the Pharisees and scribes was the educated and cultured class. They looked down upon the publicans as renegades, and upon common sinners as defiled and worthless. It was an offense to them that one who claimed to be a teacher, and who gave such

striking lessons in spiritual things should humble himself and the class of teachers by such free association with the wicked and depraved. If already our Lord was giving indications of his claim to be the Messiah this intensified their feeling. These proud and selfish critics of Jesus murmured against him again and again for his efforts to win and save by close personal contact those whom they esteemed unworthy of notice. It was to meet this attitude, and this outspoken criticism, that our Lord spoke the wonderful parable recorded in this chapter.

Let us frankly take the view of many of the best interpreters, that we have here not three parables, but one. The expression "this parable" applies to the whole chapter, and not to the first section alone. At verse 8, where the turn is made from the sheep to the coin, there is no indication of the beginning of another parable, and at verse 11, where the teaching concerning the two sons is begun, there is no mention of another parable. The expression is simply "and he said." All this seems to show that we have here not three separate parables, but one parable in three sections, all

under three terms of comparison. It is a pity that traditional custom has not only marred the unity of the parable, but has misnamed its several elements. Current usage speaks of the three parables; of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son. Why change the designation on the last? Even if the designations were correct, it would be better to preserve the unity, and say, the lost son. But there is a more serious objection still to the accepted nomenclature. It emphasizes one-half of the teaching and omits the other. It emphasizes the half that has the least emphasis in the teaching itself. It puts the emphasis on "lost" rather than on "found," whereas the finding is what the Lord himself especially brings to view. If we must give a title to the whole teaching, let us call it "The Parable of the Lost and Found." The lost and found sheep, the lost and found coin, the lost and found son. It is one parable where losing and finding furnish the theme, and finding is the chief point of emphasis.

Holding this point well in mind, let us revert to the criticism which called forth the parable. It was aimed to correct the

grievous and sinful error of those who thought it beneath their dignity for a great teacher to seek the lost and find them. In three glowing and imperishable pictures the Divine Master meets the criticism at its every point of attack. He justifies himself in seeking in order that he might find the lost. And more than this, with his marvelous tact, he implies that this is the divine method. Each of the three members of the parable illustrates the general truth of the losing and finding, and also some particular detail which bears upon the criticism of the Pharisees.

I. *The Sheep Lost and Found.* The picture presented is very simple and clear. Anybody who knows anything of sheep keeping would understand it in a moment. Here is a shepherd; a man with a hundred sheep. One has got lost. Ninety-nine are safe in the fold. What would a shepherd of ordinary common sense do? Just what he is described as doing. He would go after the lost one and get it. If it were sick or hurt he would lay it on his shoulders, not on his shoulder, but on both shoulders, with its head resting on one, its body against the neck, and the hind quarters on the other

shoulder. He would tenderly care for the sheep. Not only would he rejoice over having recovered his property, and saved the life of one of his pets, he would call on his fellow-shepherds to sympathize in his joy that he got back to the fold with his found sheep. This is the simple picture. Now for the application.

Our Lord says, "Likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance." Here he turns his illustration upon his critics. Among you here on earth a sinner is despised. In heaven a recovered sinner is rejoiced over. God delights in rescue and restoration. You ought not to criticize any representative of God who goes after lost sinners and tries to bring them home. You ought to understand that God can do no less than a man, that God, in relation to sinful human beings, should have as much care for his own as a shepherd should have for a sheep. Suppose it were true that there were ninety-nine good people to one bad one. It ought to be the business of society to get that bad one straight. Suppose the ninety-nine good people should

scorn the one wanderer. Would that be right? Suppose we take your wrong opinion for granted; that you yourself do not need any repentance; that you are already well pleasing to God. Ought we to keep him, and those who represent him, from trying to save the one that is lost?

This seems to be the force of the argument. It is not necessary to discuss whether our Lord teaches that there are persons who need no repentance. All men are sinners and need to repent. He is not here discussing that point, but simply taking the critic on his own ground. To seek the lost, even when reduced to a minimum, is a divine business; and the rescue of the lost, even if they are very few, is a divine joy. Perhaps also our Lord's thought is aimed at the low estimate placed by the Pharisees upon the class of persons who were the objects of the Lord's care. One sheep in a hundred does not amount to much, but a careful shepherd does not agree to that. Good business looks after the one bad debt. The ninety-nine good ones are safe. A good captain would go after the one deserter if ninety-nine faithful troops remained. Those who are saved

do not need looking after. It is the lost one. This point finds emphatic illustration in the next section of the parable.

II. *A Coin Lost and Found.* In the first section it was a man and a sheep. The outdoor economy. In this section it is a woman and a coin. Indoor economy. The picture of human nature is thus made complete. The careful shepherd is matched by the frugal housewife. How perfectly true to human nature is the picture. We may also say by way of parenthesis, how strangely many interpreters have missed the point, and by overstraining have perverted the meaning of this simple and telling illustration. How true is the picture to feminine human nature. A woman is more disturbed by small losses than a man. If we might dare to modernize the picture, we would say that suppose a man, on starting out to business, should give his wife ten quarters, two dollars and fifty cents, for the day's marketing. In moving about one of the pieces escaping from her hands rolls away somewhere in the room and is lost. If the man himself had dropped it he would have looked about a little while, and not finding it would have

impatiently gone on to his business to make more in the time he would have spent hunting for the coin. Not so a woman. She would have done exactly as this woman in the parable. She would have moved every piece of furniture, swept the house, and sought diligently until she found it. Right here a homely incident may pardonably be used to illustrate the point. After the delivery of this sermon in a certain great tabernacle, the preacher happened to see a woman raking in the sawdust of the floor with the point of her parasol. He asked if she had lost something. She smiled and said, "I hoped you would not see me, for I dropped a nickel here where I was sitting, and am trying to find it." We both laughed over the pleasantry as illustrating the point that had been made. How true to human nature it is. The woman too calls upon her neighbors to rejoice with her in finding the piece which she had lost. Housewives of similar feeling would understand hers, and rejoice with her. The point here is that the piece was not of much value, and yet it became the object of a careful woman's solicitude. Nobody can seriously object to the woman's action,

even though it may cause a smile. A frugal housemother takes pains to find a lost coin, and rejoices in its recovery.

Does not God care when a soul is lost, when a character is marred and disfigured, when a life departs from the regular way and goes out into sin and violence? Shall a woman care for a coin, and God not care for a publican? Shall a woman rejoice over a recovered piece of money, of little value, and the Redeemer not be glad over a saved soul, even though esteemed of little value by the proud? Suppose we accept the Pharisaic estimate of publicans and sinners as being of no value, as worth no care in search, as worthy of no joy in recovery. Suppose, you proud Pharisee, you self-righteous scribe, that a publican and a sinner are outcasts and worthless. Do you expect the Creator and the Saviour of men to take your point of view? No. A human soul, in the eyes of its Creator and Redeemer is a thing of infinite value. It is to be sought with diligence, and when it is found and saved and purified, its recovery is a signal for celestial joy, for divine delight. How wonderfully does the Lord thus turn the point of his argument upon the

selfish and proud critics of his course. It is not that he thought a soul of little value, but he made them see that even if it were so, that soul would be worth a search, and worthy of a song.

Notice that the proportion is less in this section of the parable. It was one sheep out of a hundred. It is one coin out of ten. In the last section of the parable, to which we now come, it is one out of two. Let us not miss the force of this. The Master is getting very close to his critics. We have had a shepherd and a sheep, a woman and a coin. The last section brings us to a father and a son. But the lesson, though growing in power, is the same in each instance.

III. *A Lost and Found Son.* The parable is a climax, and we come now to its height. This section still presents the force of human nature. A man has two sons. One is wild. He wants his share of the coming estate, and wants it now. We wonder at the father's willingness to give the boy his share in advance and let him go. But sometimes the best way to deal with a wayward boy is to let him have his foolish way, and it is one of those times which is depicted in this section of the parable. The beautiful

story is very familiar. Away the careless youth goes, wastes his money in riotous living, and comes to want. Reduced to hunger and rags he seeks work, and is sent to take care of swine. Hungry to the uttermost, he shares the food of his pigs, and then begins to think. Visions of plenty that he had enjoyed in the father's house come to him. The affectionate care of his father smites him to the heart. He knows he is unworthy of home. He will go and seek forgiveness and restoration. Now the scene shifts to the father, whose affectionate concern for his wayward boy had never ceased. He thought the boy would come back, and was on the lookout. One day he espies a traveler afoot and far away. It is his boy. He quickly leaves his outpost, and runs down the road and clasps the boy in his arms. The boy makes his humble confession, admits his unworthiness, and asks that he may be admitted as a servant. But the father checks him, assuring him he is still a son; makes provision for the immediate relief of his necessities; welcomes him home with a feast; and makes the whole household rejoice over the finding of his lost son.

Meantime, yonder in the field the brother who had not strayed hears the noise of joyous festivity in the home. His narrow and jealous soul wonders what it all may be about. Coming to the house he does not enter, but skulks on the outside to inquire of a servant what all that racket meant. The servant informs him that his brother, the long lost wanderer, has come home again, and the joy of the house is over that happy event. The father hears of the elder son's criticism, and ill feeling, and comes out to ask him to join in the rejoicing over the recovery of his brother. He scorns his brother, feeling contempt for one who had wasted his substance and had defiled himself with the evil companionship of the world. Proud of his own frugality and morality, he looks with anger instead of rejoicing on the return of his erring brother to the home life. The joy of the father brings no joy to him. This dissolute intruder, who had had his day and lost it, was no brother of his. If his father chose to regard him as a son that was the father's affair; he would not esteem him a brother. Meanly he taxes the father with want of liberality to himself

and is jealous of the feast which has been spread for the returning penitent. The father gently rebukes him, reminding him that at any time he could have his own share in the estate, and that all that was in the home was at his disposal. But no. No appeal could reach that jealous, narrow, self-righteous spirit, and he refuses utterly to take part in the rejoicings of the household. The father justifies his own action in the glorious fact that the wanderer had returned. A son had been reclaimed and restored. Surely there can be no higher joy in an earthly home than such a return as this. Every good instinct of humanity rises to the picture here presented. It is surprising and painful that anyone could manifest the spirit of the elder son. But that is just the point.

Gradually our Lord has come to the main point of his teaching, and strikes his critics this sledge hammer blow at the close. The publican and sinner were their brothers; children of Abraham; bound by every tie of humanity and kinship. Grant that they were bad; that they had done wrong; that they had broken the law and acted unworthily of God, of their ancestry,

of the better element in their nation; that they were a disgrace and a shame. All this was the truth, but were they to be neglected? Was anyone who tried to rescue them from their evil ways and bring them to a better life to be blamed for it? Was he who loved their souls to be sharply attacked because he saw there was hope to win from among this class those who would be purified and fitted for higher and better things? How sharply contrasted is this narrow spirit of pride and self-righteousness with the glowing tenderness of the father and the glad joy of even the servants who welcomed the returning prodigal. God and heaven rejoice in the saving of sinners. Of Jesus it is written, "Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame." That joy was the joy of an accomplished redemption. It was the joy of a glad heaven over a redeemed earth; the joy of unfallen angels over the restoration of fallen man; the joy of perfected saints over saved sinners. Now the answer is made. The elder son, so far from being an admirable character, is shown in his true light. The pride of the Pharisee is punctured and collapses.

There are no ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance. There is a class of self-righteous, who need rebuke, and they get it.

Looking thus upon the parable as a whole, we must be struck with the unity of its teaching, and the crushing force of its argument. Its application to this immediate circumstance is wonderfully clear and forcible. Its exhaustless teachings abide with us today. Its details have been presented in thousands of sermons, and still each point of instruction is luminous and impressive. But something is to be gained by thus endeavoring to preserve the unity of the whole, and turn its great lessons to the needs of our own day. The first of these is the one most often used and exemplified in preaching. That is, the evangelistic motive and method. The saving grace of God; his loving compassion toward lost sinners; the glory and joy of saving them. This is the immortal teaching of this parable. But we must not lose sight of the second lesson which in our Lord's own view, and because of the important circumstances, was the main one. It is a rebuke to that spirit of pride and indif-

ference which looks upon soul-saving with scorn, and has only objections to offer when efforts are made to reach and save the wicked, the lost. The cultured and moral who look down upon evangelistic efforts should lay this teaching well to heart. The indifferent and careless, who neglect the duty of soul-winning should find here a warning lest neglect should generate indifference, and indifference become hardened pride. While God and heaven rejoice in finding and saving sinners, the people of God on earth should find their business and their joy in following the Master's blessed example in seeking and saving that which is lost.

Let us repeat, with emphasis, that the key-note of the parable is the joy of finding that which was lost. The pathetic minor strain, which expresses the sorrow of losing, is offset by the brilliant major chord, which thrills with the happiness of finding. The somber shadow of the mean-spirited and narrow-minded elder brother, whose little soul could not enter into the joy of his father over the returning prodigal throws into clearer relief the bright gladness of that household, which rings with

the joy of a recovered loved one. Nor must we omit from our thought the joy of the soul that is found and saved. The returning wanderer had his portion of the happiness of the father's house. For us Christians this joy of being found may be redoubled and glorified in that of finding others. Happy the soul that can enter into the joy of the Lord by bringing other souls into that eternal gladness. Happy the church that can enhance the quiet gladness of her accustomed worship by the rapture of that experience which came to the earliest Christians, when the Lord added to them daily those who were being saved.

VII

THE FAITHFUL SAYING

"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." 1 Timothy 1:15.

IN the life and thought of men great value and meaning attach to sayings. Both in literature, and in the larger expression of thought, through conversation many sayings pass current. They are condensed and portable expressions of truth or of some aspect of truth. Inspiration has given us many of these. The Book of God is gemmed with them. Many are found in the writings of the Apostle Paul. This is one of the best known and most frequently quoted. Thousands of sermons have been preached upon it. Tracts and incidents have grown out of it. Soul winners have frequently used it in bringing sinners to the Saviour. A simple outline will serve us for a study of this great word. It is strikingly introduced, clearly stated, and personally applied.

I. *Strikingly Introduced.* The character of the saying is sketched beforehand. It is thus introduced and commended to the reader or hearer. We know in our social intercourse how much depends upon a suitable introduction. We bring our friend to another friend. We say something that will make a favorable impression. How beautiful is a pleasant introduction. It is thus with our saying. Before it is ever stated it is described as being "faithful and worthy of all acceptance." Its two outstanding qualities are brought to notice before its richness and fullness of meaning are themselves set forth.

It is a faithful saying. Does it strike us that this word is unusual when applied to things rather than to persons? The English word does not fully render the original, and yet it is quite suitable. The idea of value is involved in the Greek. It is a genuine and precious saying, yet the thought of fidelity is perhaps the most prominent in the description. It is a trustworthy saying. We may say that, like a faithful person, it will do what is expected of it. Trust it and it will not fail you. Put something into its charge, and it will abun-

dantly meet the confidence reposed. It never deceived anybody who really accepted and trusted it. In this sense it has been and remains a faithful word.

A story is told of a shepherd dog in the bleak mountains of Scotland. A sudden snow storm came. The experienced and trusted keeper of the flock could not get them to the fold in time, but he drove them into a cove of the mountains where they were found safe by the shepherd next day —but the dog was frozen stiff, dead at his post of duty. Faithful dog.

At the close of the Civil War in the United States, when the Southern negro slaves were all freed and the ties which had bound master and servants together were suddenly disrupted, and relations changed, there were found in many Southern homes a few of the old servants who, though free to go, preferred to remain as hired servants with those whom they had formerly served as slaves. Nothing finer in human character has appeared than the affectionate fidelity of many of those who were a comfort and a help in times of poverty, misfortune and change. Faithful servants.

You have a friend; you are in trouble, he stands by you; you have suffered from misunderstanding, he does not misunderstand; you are unjustly criticised, he defends you; you are overburdened with care, he helps you; you are at a loss what to do, he tells you; you are in need, he relieves you; you are in distress, he comforts you. Faithful friend.

Even so this saying is faithful. It does what is expected of it. It never yet deceived a soul that took it for just what it is worth. It stands by in every distress of temptation, in every overwhelming of grief, in every perplexity that clouds the mind or strains the heart. It is indeed faithful.

It is worthy of all acceptation—rather of all acceptance, that is, of every kind of acceptance that can be given to it. When presented to the mind it is worthy of every kind of reception which the mind can give. It is worthy of attention. Certainly a saying like this should not fail to receive the attention of any human being, for it comes to meet a universal human need, and offers help where men are most helpless. It is worthy of the best mental action that it

can receive. No discovery of science, no deduction of human reasoning, no quest of imagination can seek or reach what is more worthy of such action than this great and faithful word. To say that it should meet with thoughtful and rational consideration is to say only what the saying itself demands. But intellect is not all. A saying like this comes home to the deepest feelings. It touches the heart as well as claims the attention of the intellect. This is not a word which should fall upon a cold heart. How could it do otherwise than warm the deepest feelings of which we are capable? The saying should be welcomed into the region of tenderness, of deep personal emotion. If it means what it says and is trustworthy, there should be every inclination to accept it. It is protective, appealing, winsome, comforting, hopeful. Again this saying presents itself to choice. It does not compel assent nor dissent. It seeks recognition on its merits, on its reasonableness, its verity, its historic reality, its tested character. It is worthy of every right effort that the will can make in giving it favor to the reason, and preciousness to the heart. Thus every faculty of

the soul that is or can be concerned in the acceptance of such a saying will be worthily so concerned when the saying is presented. We might go further still and say that the dignity of the saying, considering its origin and its claim, makes it worthy of acceptance. It is an overture from God. This is its unique claim for itself. The claim of course must be tested, but it will stand the test; it has stood it. The claim itself is of no small dignity and grandeur. Thus, in every way conceivable is the saying commended to the acceptance of mankind.

II. *Clearly Stated.* What then is this great saying? It is the heart of the gospel, it is the burden of the Bible, prefigured in prophecy, realized in history: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." The language is simple, the thought profound and sublime. He was, and remains, a historic character, this Christ Jesus. No figure is better or more definitely outlined in the historic sense of mankind than that of Jesus of Nazareth. The account of his life is very brief. The active life itself was very short. Compared with the centuries before and after, the brief

years of his earthly ministry were but as a flash upon a canvas, but that life glows with quenchless brilliancy. Its light can never be put out, its meaning can never be withdrawn from the current affairs of human destiny. Jesus was and remains unique among human beings. Every attack which has tried to discredit him has only left him more strong and clear. The extreme folly of those who have tried to make him out only a myth has been shown. The fact of his life, the burden of it, the meaning of it, the purpose of it, the effect of it—these are the sure data of history.

The saying indicates something unusual in the coming of Jesus Christ into human life and history. He came not as other men came. There was something mysterious even on the human side in his birth. More is meant in the statement than that he was born at a certain time and place. He came into the world as if from some other sphere, as with some higher and more significant aim and purpose than the common man. There is an impressiveness in the very simplicity of the statement, as if he was a person of special dignity or moment, whose coming into the world was an

event out of the ordinary. Yet he came with no world-wide display. Quietly, humbly, pathetically, but beautifully he came into the world. No silken couch in a lordly palace was prepared for his tender infantile body. No garments soft and costly circled his baby form, but the coarse swaddling bands of poverty enveloped first the faultless beauty of his babyhood. He came into the world not as a conquerer, with armies to overwhelm it; not as a multimillionaire to buy it with its own treasures; not as an invincible philosopher to sweep away its intellectual freedom by the force of imperious logic. Aims like these were very far from his purpose, that was much simpler and yet much greater than any of them.

He came into the world to save sinners. This was his business; this was his life; this was the center of his teaching; this was the motive of his self sacrifice; this was the meaning of his crucifixion; this was to be the triumph of his resurrection; this is to be the consummation of his final triumph when he shall come the second time, without sin, unto salvation. Whoever in human history proposed to himself a mission like

this? What higher aim could ever animate the loftiest purposes of a man than this? It is easy to repeat to ourselves that herein is expressed the divine purpose of redemption, but to grasp the fullness of the meaning involved in that statement of the gospel is not so easy. We readily perceive in the story of our Lord's life how this aim was supreme in his own consciousness and in his endeavor. He declared that he had come "to seek and to save that which was lost." He was called the friend of sinners. He pronounced himself to be the way to God, the light of the world. He proclaimed that uplifted on his cross he would draw all men unto himself. He asserted that he had come not to receive service from others, but to render the highest of all service by giving his life as a ransom for many.

It is needless to say that this view of the mission of Jesus in the world was that which impressed most his immediate followers; those who were charged with the furtherance of his work through all time. They were to preach the gospel to every creature. They were to make disciples of all the nations. From the original center,

they were to go out to the uttermost parts of the earth, charged with the message and good news of redemption from sin. John, the forerunner, proclaimed him as "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." Peter, the leader of the apostles, preached him as bearing the only name under heaven whereby we must be saved. John, the beloved, declares that he comes as the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world. This also was the burden and the glory of that rich and fruitful witness borne in so many places and through such unexampled toils and sufferings by the great Apostle to the Gentiles. Many of his richest sayings find their fullness of meaning in this great thought. It was the core of his own personal experience.

III. *Personally Applied.* "Of whom I am chief." At first this expression causes surprise. We are so accustomed to think of Paul as the chief of all Christians that we cannot understand how he could think himself to be the chief of all sinners. He nowhere claims to be the chief of Christians. In the exercise of his office he declares that he is no whit behind the chief-

est of the apostles, but that was because his Lord had placed him there. It was not because he had sought the distinction, or thought himself worthy of it. That is an official declaration; this is a personal one. Still the question comes back, how could Paul say this? Was he insincere? Is this a bit of extravagant self-depreciation? We answer at once emphatically in the negative. The whole life and teaching of the eminent apostle is a refutation of any charge of insincerity. He was making no bid for the reputation of humility. He was writing to his own son in the gospel, to his most intimate companion, with the possible exception of Luke. He was unfolding to his friend the very heart of his heart. What he says here he says with the deepest conviction, with the utmost sincerity. He really felt himself to be the "first," that is the word, the first of all sinners. In that large class of delinquents he mournfully stood at the head. Granting sincerity, we still must ask how could Paul honestly think himself to be the first of sinners? Is it not a morbid though sincere estimate? Was not the conscience too tender? Did not the overwhelming sense of his former

guilt as a persecutor upset the balance of his judgment and make him think of himself more humbly than he ought to have thought? We answer, yes, there is probably some truth in this view of the matter, yet we would not say it was in any degree a morbid view. It was Paul's own sincere feeling, but we are not bound to agree with him. It was the genuine utterance of a soul deeply conscious of fault, but we, whose faults are as great or greater, cannot willingly place our great brother above ourselves in rank as sinners. We cheerfully yield him preference in saintliness and in service, but not in sinfulness and in blame. What we are concerned with here, however, is not the comparative point of view, but the positive. We leave ourselves and all other saved sinners out of the comparison. We come back to Paul, sole and individual. Why did he feel himself to be the chief of sinners?

Notice that his description of himself is still in the present tense. He does not say "of whom I was once chief," but "of whom I am now the chief." Certainly this does not mean that he was a condemned sinner. No saint ever more fully and gloriously rejoiced in the consciousness of

salvation through grace than did Paul himself. He was a saved sinner, but still he cannot lose sight of the fact that in himself he still, though saved, and even assured, stands in his own consciousness as first in the company of sinners. Two things we must here bear in mind if we would understand the psychology of this profound and somewhat puzzling statement. First, we must see how the shadow of the past falls across the experience of the present. He goes on to explain. His former character and quality were those of "blasphemer," "persecutor," and "injurious." This was his character when he was arrested and converted. He never, never could forget it. The sin was forgiven but he could not erase it from his memory, nor excuse it. His Lord had forgiven him, but he never could forgive himself. He was not a thief nor a liar nor a profligate. The gross sins had never been his. Upright and moral, from his youth his life had been, by human standards, above reproach. But that such a man as that, with all the moral and spiritual advantages that he had, should have been a willing murderer of Stephen and others, should have dragged innocent and

good men and even women to prison and to death; that such a man as he should have denied the Lord who had bought him, and blasphemed the name of the high God who had loved him, and was willing to redeem him—these were the things that bore upon his conscience. There are distinct traces of this shadow over his soul throughout his utterances. The second thing we must bear in mind in trying to estimate aright this seemingly exaggerated statement is that in his present consciousness Paul realized his weakness and his natural and inherent sinfulness. That he had been capable of such outrageous sin in the past shows that he had the possibility still in himself of being what he had been. Converted and changed indeed he was, but still he was Saul of Tarsus though changed into Paul the Apostle. It was not his own goodness, but the grace of God that kept him now. But for that grace, and in himself alone he still is what he was; the first of sinners.

Such an experience is not without other notable examples. Many of the greatest saints of history, after their conversion, have felt precisely as Paul did. Still so conscious of their weakness and so un-

forgetting of their past, they bear with them ever the deep and poignant consciousness of sin and ill desert. In fact it is scarcely possible for an unconverted sinner to feel himself to be as sinful as he really is. Usually the chief of sinners, before conversion, makes excuses to himself and others for his sins. He is cheerfully no worse than the rest of mankind; in some respects he may consider himself even better than the average. Doubtless Saul of Tarsus himself did this, and the memory of his former pride only struck deeper the sting of his present consciousness of sin. One's sense of guilt, strange as it may seem, grows in intensity with the growth of his holiness and the sense of God's pardoning love. The better a man becomes and the more deeply sensible of the divine grace, the more keenly does he feel his own sinfulness. There is no sadder contradiction in religious experience than pride of pardon. This is the opposite of what we are trying here to describe.

It is only this deep consciousness of sin that can really appreciate the value of the faithful saying that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." This is

what we all ought to do. Whether we are saved sinners or still unsaved makes no great difference as to this point. Our business is to feel our sins. Surely apart from all comparison or foolish pride they are enough in number and degree to humble us in the very dust. Be it ours to take our place by the side of this great saint, and realize with him that we are chief among sinners. What flimsy excuses can we render, what pitiful comparison with others can we make that will shift the real burden of our guilt? Oh! none, none. Let each one of us for himself learn to think of his own past sins and present sinfulness as the main thing to be concerned with in order that we may fully understand the blessedness of this faithful saying. There is a way out. Look back to that gracious and beautiful young man who, with the light of heaven upon his face, walks amid the multitudes gathered to witness the baptism of John and hear the forerunner say, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." The very chief of sinners is not too much of a sinner to be saved by so great a Saviour.

VIII

THE OPEN SECRET OF A GREAT LIFE

"And the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Gal. 2:20.

IN this declaration we have the open secret of a great life. The underlying principle and the inspiring motive of an eminent and useful career are here brought to view. These words are the expression of a sincere and loyal soul. They reveal to us the profoundest conviction and the loftiest experience of Paul, the man and the apostle. The beliefs and even the opinions of a man are best judged by the fruits they bear in his own actions and accomplishments, and conversely, the actual outcome of a man's life points back infallibly to the inner convictions and motives by which the outward life has been directed to its highest achievements. No finer example of this truth can be found in religious history than that of Paul. In

many notable passages of his writings he has left on record, in vigorous and manly language, clear statements of those intellectual and moral convictions which were the guiding principles of his conduct. The life which he led was founded, after his conversion, upon the facts and truths which that conversion led him to accept. The doctrines of Paul found in his lifetime many opposers, and have not ceased to meet that experience in all subsequent times. The theological and philosophical aspects of those teachings do not here concern us. The practical outcome of Paul's beliefs in his own life of service to the world is the point we now have in view. Central among his doctrines was that which related to the work of Christ as a Saviour from sin. As this was the center of his thinking, so it is also the heart of his living. And this view of the matter finds clear and admirable expression in the words of the text. The atoning sacrifice of Christ, accepted by personal faith, is the open secret of Paul's wonderful and glorious life. Three distinctive features of that life are suggested by the glowing language of the text. First, it was a life lived

under the usual human conditions; and, secondly, it was a life redeemed from the ordinary by the outworking of a great principle; and, thirdly, it was a life glorified in its response to the highest sentiment. Let us dwell upon these items in the order given.

I. It was a life lived under the usual human conditions. Paul describes it as "the life which I now live in the flesh." The statement is simple, modest and frank. There is here no claim to the extraordinary, the miraculous, the spectacular. Paul's consciousness and conscience forbade any such claim. He was a man of like passions with his brothermen. He lived on their plane, and shared their experiences. His was a common though not a commonplace life. The human reality of it is distinctly asserted in the statement. More than this, there is suggestion of the weak and evil element of human existence in the mention of the flesh.

We note therefore that Paul's life in the flesh was a life subject to human weakness. Of course this was true, and readers of the Apostle's writings do not need to be told that in many another place besides

this he refers to his natural human infirmities. He was deeply, intensely conscious of these. Not even in his highest moments is he unaware of the drawback and the distress of human infirmity. No sane and candid man can feel otherwise. "The ills that flesh is heir to" are our conscious and common human lot. We need not grow morbid in the consciousness of these, but neither should they be forgotten nor ignored. Bodily, mental and moral infirmity is the hourly experience of us all. Our consciousness is infested with the sense of weakness.

We must also remember that the life in the flesh is one of sorrow and trial. Disappointments, burdens, griefs and cares multiply upon us daily. No man can live a life worth anything without his ample portion of these. This was true of Paul. Pathetically he tells us that what was lacking in the suffering of Christ was made up in himself. Like his divine Master, he too was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." Wounds of friends, persecution of enemies, disappointments of aim, all were his. Sickness and grief and death shadowed his soul. He was not im-

mune from the griefs which distress the average human life.

Again we must remember that the life in the flesh is a life of temptation and of sin. In the seventh chapter of Romans Paul lays bare the intensity of his personal struggle with sin. He claimed no faultless perfection for himself. Temptation without and evil tendency within made his conscious life a fight. The moral athlete in him was engaged in a constant bout to buffet his body, and bring it into subjection. The manliest struggle in the world is the conflict with personal sin. The most crushing and humiliating defeats, and the most joyful and triumphant victories are found on this field. No one has described in stronger or more impressive language than has Paul himself this double aspect of the struggle with sin: "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." We thus see what in the consciousness of Paul the life in the flesh meant. It corresponds with the universal human experience. It is what modern philosophy teaches us to call "divided self." It is

the common human life of weakness, suffering and sin. But happily the description does not end here. There is more, and much more to say of this life, though it be lived in the flesh.

II. It was a life redeemed from the ordinary by the outworking of a great principle. This is found in the statement, "I live by the faith of the Son of God." A life of weakness, suffering and sin need not be a lost and unworthy or fruitless life. There is a way to rescue such a life from the ruin it would mean if only these human elements found place in it. It is precisely here that we find the greatness and the glory of Paul's life, viz.: that being a common human life, it was yet made uncommon in its excellence and value by the coming into it of a counteracting force. The ordinary human life may be made extraordinary by the incoming and governing of a great principle. Paul leaves us at no loss concerning what that principle was in his own case. And his experience has been multiplied in millions who have shared his experience in divine grace and power.

Let us notice, as a matter of interpreta-

tion, the simplicity of the statement here. Paul does not say by faith in the Son of God, but by the faith of the Son of God. Of course he does not mean the personal faith which the human Jesus exercised for himself (Heb. 2:13), but the faith which the believer reposes upon Christ as his Saviour. The change from the usual phraseology only makes more emphatic and definite the personal relation of the believer to his Lord. His faith in the Redeemer is not only his. It is his Lord's also. Jesus is at once the source, the object and the owner of the faith which saves the trusting soul.

Now let us see how this great principle works. As a matter of experience and observation, any life becomes significant and great in proportion to the greatness and value of the things outside of itself upon which it lays hold. That which lifts the ordinary above itself is some great thing toward which it reaches, and to which it clings beyond itself. The truly great soul, as Browning suggests, greets the unseen with a cheer. In all the realm of human thought and endeavor this is true. The discoverers are they who look further out

and on. The captains of industry and the magnates of finance are those who believe in, and lay hold upon something out of the common range. The empire builders are those who are confident of greater things beyond and above the present hour and place. Trust in something great that lies beyond actual contact and achievement uplifts and dignifies life. In this phase of its working, faith is closely allied to imagination. Indeed, it may almost be identical with it. The eleventh chapter of Hebrews shows how the heroes of faith were those who looked and reached to the greater things beyond.

Faith in God is the mainspring of the spiritual life. And this great truth becomes very definite in Paul's language here. It was not the vague acceptance of an infinite power, however good that is, as a philosophic concept; nor even the clearer and stronger trust in a great personal God, a Providence, a Governor, a Lord; nor even the glorious and sublime Hebrew faith in Jehovah, the God of Israel and of mankind. It was all these and the yet more which dwelt in Paul's thought, consciousness and hope as em-

bodied and expressed in Jesus, the Son of God. It is a grand saying—"I live by the faith of the Son of God." How much for the individual and for the race is compressed and expressed in that terse saying. The historic Christ, the divine Christ, the living Christ is here in the fullness of his revelation of God, in the glory of his perfect person, in the power of his divine being. We have lost the freshness and the wonder of this great conception. Let us try anew to realize the depth and height of this great truth. God in Christ making himself known to men. God in Christ bringing men back to himself. This is the thought. Men struggling through weakness, sorrow and sin, taking into the very innermost recesses of their being Jesus, the Son of God, to be trusted with entire surrender of self to his care. The faith of the Son of God is nothing less than this. And thus it is that it becomes the uplifting power for all human life, as well as for every individual that will enter into this blessed relation. We need not expect to be as great or as useful as Paul, but the faith which sustained him can strengthen us. The faith that lifted his life above

the low level of common humanity can lift ours above the average. Multiplied thousands of believers less noble than Paul have been rendered in their own sphere and place efficient and fruitful by the outworking of this same principle.

III. It was a life glorified in its response to the highest sentiment. This is brought out in the words "Who loved me, and gave himself for me." That great truth which was the central object of Paul's faith, was also the controlling motive of his life. The atoning self-sacrifice of Christ was to him the central point in the gospel as a faith. That the Son of God should love a man enough to die for him is surely all sufficient reason why the ransomed life should be devoted to the benefactor. Paul makes a personal matter of it. None could be more ready than he to recognize and to rejoice in the world-wide work of Christ in his saving power. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. But that great truth becomes a personal possession in the consciousness of the redeemed soul. There is no selfishness in this. It is only the necessary personal appropriation of that which avails for all, is

sufficient for all. My own appropriation of it hinders no one else, and makes me desirous to share it with all whom I can reach. It is perfectly right for each of us to say with Paul, "He loved me, and gave himself for me." This intensifies while it makes real the glorious truth of the gospel.

The truth thus personally appropriated becomes the grand motive of the Christian life. Men are moved to their most strenuous endeavors by sentiment more than by intellectual process. It is what we feel rather than what we think which moves us to action. This is true both ways. Both our worst deeds and our best are the products of feeling rather than of thought. Let us not under-rate the intellectual. We need it to restrain emotion and to guide our feelings and to justify the actions which have been produced by feeling. But after all, great deeds are usually the expression of high emotion. Take the great and important events and issues of life. Reasoning may lay plans, produce arguments, calculate effects, but it takes the spark of feeling to start the machinery and the motive power of sustained enthusiasm

to carry great enterprises through. This is true all the way from personal experiences to great national movements. Remember the Spanish War of 1898. Everything had been reasoned out why the miserable Spanish *régime* in Cuba should be ended. It had become intolerable. It was the explosion that blew up the *Maine* that sent the thrill through the country and moved the United States to immediate action. In every human life, in every family, in every community, illustrations abound.

The greatest of all sentiments is love. Love realized, accepted, appreciated and returned; this is the great force. Take two cases. Mother love is not intellectual, but sentimental. A mother does not need to justify by rational processes the overmastering instinct of love for her offspring. She never reasons out her duty to love and care for her children. She does not need to. Take the pure and tender love of sex. A young man would be extremely foolish to try to win his love with syllogism. Surely such love should be rational, guided and sustained by intellectual process, by good sense, but if it

should be a reasoning process only, it would always be a failure. So in a thousand ways we know that the love motive, while it ought to walk hand in hand with reasoning as a guide, is really the moving power for the great influences in life.

The greatest love is the love of God. Wonderful is that saying "God is love." Wonderful, too, the divine announcement that "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." When this comes into the life of any human being it should be at once the ranking motive. With Paul it was so. Elsewhere he writes, "The love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge that if one died for all, then all died: And he died for all that they who live should live no longer for themselves, but for him who, on their behalf, died and rose again." The love of God, nay, we may say, the God who is love, came personally into human experience generally, into Paul's particularly, as "The Son of God who loved me, and gave himself for me." That divine-human love of Jesus, revealing itself at its perfection of power in the cross, abides forever the main motive of the Christian life. When lesser things,

which should be subordinate, take the place of this, our Christian living and our Christian working always suffer. We do our best as individuals and as churches and as larger groups when we consciously, and to the limit, work under the inspiring motive of loving the Christ who loved us unto the end.

If an infant could say for itself what we may say for it from the moment of its sweet entrance upon life, it would say, "I live by trusting one who loves me." As we grow through youth into maturity, and strive through middle age into tottering childhood again, we can only repeat, "I live by trusting those who love me." So for the Christian soul, from the moment of its glad and conscious acceptance of Jesus the Saviour, through all the experiences, bright or dark, of the unfolding Christian life, it can only say, "I live by trusting him who loved me."

Thus has Paul written for us the perfect sketch of a true Christian life. Be it ours to make our own the experience here set forth. We need not feel discouraged or reluctant in making the attempt to realize his words in our own case by the obvious

distance which lies between ourselves and the great Apostle. Let us remember that he says elsewhere, "Be ye imitators of me as I am also of Christ." Each one of us, in his own measure and within his own limitations, can reduce to reality the splendid ideal here set before us. Privilege means possibility, and possibility means duty. No Christian, however humble, can do more, none ought to attempt less, than to live his life according to the outline here so glowingly proposed. Seeking the aid of the Holy Spirit, praying daily, guarding our thoughts, let each of us be able to say with all earnestness and sincerity, "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

IX

CHRIST THE CORNER-STONE

"Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone." Eph. 2:20.

THE foundation and progress of a building is a fit and striking figure whereby to set forth the entrance and growth of religious truth in human character and history. The life and work of Jesus instituted a new and fruitful era in the religious history of mankind. For though the unseen God had declared himself "in many parts and in many ways" in the life and literature of his chosen people of Israel, he made a fuller revelation in the person and teachings of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Those who accepted for themselves the divine mission and character of the Saviour, and became by reason of their own deep convictions the means of passing on the truth to others, constituted or laid the foundation of that spiritual edifice of truth and influence that has arisen and grown under the name of the Christian religion. In his remarkable saying to Simon, "Thou art Peter and on

this rock I will build my church," Christ had himself used the figure that is more fully elaborated here. If he meant, as some hold, that upon Peter himself, not exclusively but representatively, his religion was to be founded, it was equivalent to saying that upon the character and work of Peter and the others as believers in himself was his church to be built. And this meaning is carried out in the present passage, where those who accepted the truth are said to be "built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets." For by "Prophets" here are meant not those of the old Testament, but those of the New, the companions and colaborers of the Apostles. It is as if Paul would say, these are the foundation; you, and all like you who receive the truth they proclaimed, are the growing building. Or, if we put the other accepted interpretation upon Chist's words to Peter, and say that he meant by the "rock" the confession of Peter as to his divine origin and mission, we shall find a parallel to that view here also in saying that "the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets" is not the persons of these worthies but the foundation which they laid in their preaching of the gospel. I in-

cline to the latter view throughout. But waiving the question of exact interpretation, in either case Christ is the "chief Corner-stone." This Jesus had not said of himself, but Paul does not omit to say it. Christ is himself the vital element of the religion which Apostles taught and which all true Christians have received from them. Or, to go back to the figure,— of that noble edifice of spiritual truth and life, whose foundations were laid by the Apostles, and whose stately structure has grown through all the ages since their day, Jesus Christ himself abides the chief corner-stone. It is not only the memory of a departed Christ that gives strength and stability as of a firm corner-stone; but it is also the supporting power of a still living and now reigning Christ that preserves the structure from irretrievable fall. In other words, Christ is still the mainstay of the Christian religion, both in the abiding results and influences of his earthly life, and in the present and eternal power of his heavenly reign.

The leading outlines of the glorious edifice thus founded and sustained have been sketched by a masterhand: "Now abideth faith, hope, love; these three."

These are the principal elements of the religion of Jesus. When centered in Christ as their origin and support, and when mutually interactive and effectively combined, "these three" constitute the sum and substance of Christianity. They are the vital necessities of any true and worthy religious life, and growth. Let our present concern be the pregnant consideration, that as faith, hope and love are essential to religion, so is Christ essential to them. No faith to live and die by apart from him; no hope worth the having, that does not rest on him; no love that "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things," except it be the "love that is in Christ Jesus."

I. *Faith.* One of the great motive forces in life is faith. In its many forms, and varying with its objects and its strength, this deep rooted principle of our nature is a busy and a mighty worker. In religion and the closely related matters of morals and science, its power and value are untold. The Bible recognizes it as indispensable in religion. It touches most deeply and vitally the sphere of practical and daily morals. It goes hand in hand with knowledge. It is not knowledge, but

it rests on partial knowledge. It is not reason, and yet it is not necessarily irrational. While pervading and influencing the whole nature of man, it is yet chiefly concerned with the intellect. It is founded on knowledge, justified by reason, and glorified by imagination. It is the motive power in religious acceptance, practice and extension. It builds where doubt destroys, strengthens where doubt benumbs. It sees enough where skepticism is blind, and credulity sees too much.

Christ is the corner-stone of a complete religious faith, because he is at once its object and its inspiration. He is ever presenting himself as its object, and in words of later date than his own, he is described as "the Author and Finisher of our faith." He is the foundation of a rational religious faith, because he is fully worthy of it; and of a true religious faith, because his demands on it are not extravagant. Faith has three enemies: no faith, wrong faith, and over faith. It is liable to injury by defect, perversion and excess; and the names of these are, skepticism, heresy and superstition. Christ is the corner-stone of faith accordingly, because he offers the best refuge against these foes.

1. As against utter skepticism he offers in himself a sure and worthy object of religious confidence. But for having Christ to believe in, true religious faith would have long been lost. Mill has said that, "the rational attitude of a thinking mind toward the Supernatural, whether in natural or in revealed religion, is that of skepticism as distinguished from belief on the one hand, and from atheism on the other." Jesus says, "Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God and believe in me." He would refute an irrational skepticism, by presenting the one worthy object of a reasonable faith. Utter unbelief is not a good state of mind for a rational man. Absolute skepticism is scarcely a possible, though an imaginable position. If fully carried out it ends in absurdity; it would deny all knowledge and doubt even self. Let the perplexed mind come away from the Cimmerian darkness of skepticism and calmly and reasonably rest by faith in Jesus. We need, even now, the saving presence, the conservative influence of Christian faith to prevent science itself from committing suicide. Christ yet abides worthy of confidence.

2. As against the perversions of faith

both in theory and practice, Christ is the best safeguard. From the wrangle of dogma, and the heavy inferences of human logic, we need to get back oftentimes to the simplicity that is in Christ. For all false doctrine, he is himself the best antidote. To sit at his feet and learn of him is far better than to seek cart-loads of rubbish in the way of human additions and distortions of his teachings. So, too, have deeds of dark and fearful cruelty been wrought and called acts of faith; but from such dire perversions of a true and worthy faith in him, he is himself the best deliverer.

3. As against the wild and foolish extremes of blind credulity, Christ presents us a safe and sober confidence in himself. In the pure but misapplied name of faith unreason has been worshiped, and vile orgies of superstition and crime have been held. Real faith in Christ as he is, opposes all ruinous superstition and puts away with firm and vigorous hand the follies of a too eager credulity.

So in all these ways does true faith in Christ do its blessed work. He supports that faith as its corner-stone, interposing a check to extremes everywhere. To the

intolerance of the scornful philosopher, to the cruelty of the over zealous fanatic, and to the darker folly of the credulous votary of superstition, we who believe in Christ, can oppose a safe and rational resistance. Let the soul come out of these things to him, and find a sure resting place. He is best guide and help to reason in her search for truth.

II. *Hope.* We may endorse as a general truth the oft quoted lines of Pope: "Hope springs eternal in the human breast." It is one of the greatest of life's great powers. Its gentle sway is acknowledged, its great strength confessed. We read how in past ages it led with bright and happy foot-step to all that was good; we see today that it puts a heightened charm on all that is fair, and sheds what is often the only light on that which is dark. We must not strangle hope. We sometimes find it poor living at best, but with hope gone who *could* live? Pervading and animating all life, it comes with a force and loveliness peculiarly its own to take its place in the realm of religion. It, too, may enter into and move the whole being, but its special alliance is with the feelings. It gives a joy and lightness to all the emotional

nature as it is engaged and used in the service of religion. And Christ is the corner-stone of hope as well as of faith because he gives to it a sure basis and high objects. In his hands hope becomes more what it ought to be. It will scarcely be denied that the hopes held out by the Christian religion are both glorious and good, and that as compared with other hopes of this sort they are most worthy to be cherished. We can see this more plainly if we consider that hope, too, may suffer from denial, or falsehood, or extravagance. Now Christ is hope's corner-stone because he supports a true and good hope amid these opposing elements.

1. Men have sometimes painfully said, "There is no hope." In other things as well as religion have these sad words been spoken. But we cannot deny that there are real hopes held out to us by Christ. He only puts our religious longings on such basis of positive statement as to make them reasonable hopes instead of idle fancies.

Despair goes with unbelief, but hope walks hand in hand with faith. We need hope's counteracting influence against the dark spirit of the times. We are very

busy, but much I fear we are not as hopeful as we ought to be. Everywhere the dark shadow of hopelessness spreads over us. But in Christ, O despairing soul! there is refuge, a "sure support against despair."

2. Men often build their hopes on insufficient grounds, or cherish delusive expectations. Thus hope also is marred by perversion. Against this we plead the offset of the hopes that are in Christ. He is the giver of a better and a surer hope than any other. Let us correct all our expectation of a future life, all our longings for a better life, by what he has taught. Let no dangerous delusions usurp the place of the Christian's sweet hope. Let that blessed influence repose on the word and the promises of Jesus.

3. Men sometimes cherish vague and extravagant hopes, not clearly drawn from what Christ has said, but made of their own or others' visions and fancies. For this, too, Christ is the sure corrective. He restrains all extravagance, and remains himself the stable basis of those rational expectations which enter into the Christian's hope. Both for this life and for that which is to come, the best hope is in

Christ. Let it here, and here only, be sought; for here, and here only, will it certainly be found. So of hope, also, is Christ the chief corner-stone.

III. *Love.* We sometimes speak of love in one of its forms as "the great principle"; and though there be a tinge of flippancy in the saying, there is in it a better element of truth. In its various modes of being and action love is one of the prime elements of life. In religion its place is assured. There is no need here of definition or explanation. Taking it in the broadest sense of love for God and man, we recognize its great place and power in any true religious life. It needs not to be said how truly it is one of the very fundamental principles of the Christian religion. Though, alas! it must with shame be owned that we have not yet seen its full power displayed, nor its blessed work completely carried out. Yet it remains true that, in so far as religion is love, Christ abides the corner-stone of the fabric. For as a religious principle, love is best set forth in Him. His teachings give to it its true interpretation; his life affords its best illustration, his promises its noblest end on earth and in heaven.

1. Jesus gave to the "royal law" of God emphatic repetition and enforcement: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart; and thy neighbor as thyself." He endorsed this as the true explanation of love; and all his teachings are instinct with this thought.

2. In his life of loving service to man, and loving duty to God, Christ has given the perfect illustration of the principle he declared. By his own complete realization of the ideal, he has given to love a motive and an inspiration forever. Nowhere else does love to God and man so powerfully appeal to our whole being as in the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth.

3. In his promises and revelations, where he has joined hope to love, Christ has given to love itself a worthy aim and offered it a glorious reward. During our present life, all that is best and purest in humanity is encouraged here. We look for the best times on this earth when the principles and practice of Christian love shall be in the ascendant. Herein is offered to men a surer promise of earthly good than in all the Utopian schemes of visionary reformers. Even many who have rejected faith in Christ are yet try-

ing to hold fast by his love as the best heritage of the past, the surest pledge of the future. But beyond the narrow confines of our earthly life he points us to the completed perfection and the unhindered sway of love in a better life whose chief glory shall be love's realization. So is he the chief element in love as it is manifest and active in the religious life of men. Christ both makes love a duty, and he ennobles it. The antidote to hatred, the best guide to love, is he. Under his lead it will more widely extend its power over men, and will become more and more what it ought to be. More powerfully are Christians coming to realize the obligation of love. In many ways we see the token of love's coming triumph. Slowly it moves on to victory—but it moves! All moral and religious progress here on earth must have this element. All heavenly joy is to be wholly sanctified in this pure presence. And of this is Christ the corner-stone!

Faith, hope, love! This is religion. Of this is Christ all and in all. The fair fabric rests on him as its principal support. They help each other, a triple column sitting on the one Foundation. Faith gives basis to hope, and motive to love;—hope

gives joy to faith, and charm to love;—and love gives back again, in rich measure, gentleness to faith and loveliness to hope. "And the greatest of these is love." Greater than faith, because when faith gives place to perfect knowledge, love shall bless the consummation. Greater than hope, because when hope ends in possession, its best fruition is itself eternal love. Greater than faith, because when faith grows dim love still can work; greater than hope, because when even hope dies love can live. Greater than both, because they are earthly necessities, but love is a heavenly principle. Greater than both, because they are human needs, but love is a divine fulfilment. Men must needs have faith and hope; God has need of neither; but *God is love.*

In the house whose corner-stone we lay today may Christ be set forth the corner-stone of faith, hope and love; may many minds here be reached; many hearts here touched, till, in heaven, the completed building of human character may be the holy temple of our God, "Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone."

X

CHRISTIAN LOVE AND ITS MOTIVE

"Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour." Eph. 5:1, 2.

THIS text is full of great thoughts. The love of God, the acceptable sacrifice of Christ, the privileges and consequent duties of God's children, all are more or less distinctly emphasized in these words.

There is special reference to love as the distinguishing characteristic of the Christian life. It is urged upon us as that quality of the divine character which we should try to imitate. It is enforced by the great example of Christ. We may consider the text, then, as setting forth the subject of Christian love and the motives to its exercise; and the thoughts suggested may be arranged under the two general heads of exhortation and motive.

I. EXHORTATION. "Be ye followers of God. . . . Walk in love." It is the same exhortation though expressed in these two ways. At the close of the previous chapter

the Apostle urges his readers to lay aside 'all anger and wrath and clamor and evil-speaking with all malice,'' and to be ''kind, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.'' Then he proceeds in the text, ''Be ye *therefore* followers of God.'' *Imitators* of God would perhaps more accurately express the sense.

Though God be so far above us; though he be the Almighty, the All-wise, the All-good; though his thoughts are higher than our thoughts and his ways higher than our ways; we are yet exhorted to be like him. Though we are sinners and weak; though we have fallen far from him, and are full of conscious imperfection we must try to be like God. It is truly a noble and an ennobling thought that we should be God-like. Though fallen from the image and likeness of God in which we were created, it is yet our privilege and our duty by God's own grace assisted to try hard to regain the almost effaced impression. To be like God is the highest object we can strive for, and though indwelling and external sin makes the work exceedingly difficult, the goal is worth the strife. Far better be thus employed than in sui-

cidally and fatally marring the blessed image which Christ died again to imprint!

It is true we can only imitate God in his imitable characteristics. It would be idle and blasphemous on our pigmy scale to attempt to imitate God in everything. This is far from the Apostle's meaning. God is eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent—of course we cannot imitate these attributes. Nor can we imitate his *infinity* in any direction. He is infinite in all qualities, even in those which we should strive to follow. We may imitate them in *kind,* we cannot in extent. But we can and should, to the full measure of our finite capacity, resemble the divine character. As the Scriptures unfold that blessed character to us in all its divinely engaging beauty we should endeavor to apprehend and copy the model thus set before us.

Many are the attributes of God as taught in the Book of his truth. But one among them all occupies for us the leading place. It is at once the most intelligible and the most imitable. We are told that God *has* wisdom, power, eternity, holiness, and others—but God *is* love! GOD IS LOVE! Beautiful form of speech! Precious declaration of truth! Glorious portraiture,

of goodness. *God is love!* So they who would be God-like must be loving. This is the one thing in God's character most emphasized to us. It is that quality we can, not easily I know, but which we can daily and hourly follow. We can be loving, aye, we *must.* Toward God as supreme, toward Christ as Redeemer, toward men as our brothers in humanity and the common objects of divine regard and redeeming mercy, we must be loving. "Anger, wrath, clamor, evil-speaking, with all malice" must be put away. Be imitators of God!

The second clause of the exhortation brings us another phase of the subject: "Walk in love." Let love be the distinguishing feature of your Christian life. It is not enough that we should be emotionally and impulsively loving. Not enough that while we sit together in the sanctuary and engage in the devotions of the place our hearts should swell with love toward the great Father and to each other. Not enough that as the word of God is brought to us and enforced upon us by the accredited minister of the gospel we should *feel* our duty, and our hearts should expand under the influences thus brought to bear on us. All this is well, but it is not enough. "*Walk*

in love." I do not undervalue feeling. In my heart of hearts I love it, and long for more of it in myself and others. But feeling without action is well nigh worthless. It *is* abortive. "*Walk* in love."

To be sure the converse is also true. Mere mechanical sense of duty, action without the warming, quickening, driving power of feeling is lame and feeble. Let them be united, combined into one harmonious character. *Feel* loving, and *do* lovingly. Let those who are deficient in feeling cultivate that; let those who feel, but don't do much, not fail to cultivate action.

Thus only shall we be truly God-like. If he feebly *felt* loving only, where had we been? If he had not had a heart to feel and to pity how wretched had been our lot! Feeling expressed in generous, prompt and energetic action—action urged and directed by tender, yet deep feeling, *that* is the true God-like character.

"*Walk* in love." Yes; let that be the trait by which our daily life shall be most distinguished. This is but carrying out the thought of the Master when he said, "By this shall all men know that ye are *my* disciples, if ye have love one to another." It is but expressing in the way of exhorta-

tion the solemn declaration of the beloved disciple: "We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren."

Doubtless much that is said of Christian love is sickly drivel, and some is arrant nonsense. But that sham and fanaticism should give us any distaste for the real and true thing, would be very unfortunate. Christians should love all mankind, especially each other. This is scriptural. But that we should love "all alike," as it is sometimes said, is neither scriptural nor sensible nor possible. There was among the Twelve "that disciple whom Jesus loved." All are not worthy of the same degree or kind of attachment. We may love our brethren as they emphasize in their lives special graces. We may love them more or less as they approach or recede from the divine model. But this must be said, that wherever likeness to God is found, there should our Christian affections go. No matter how lowly, how poor, how far beneath us in the perishing distinctions of earth, the person may be, if in the character we recognize likeness to God, we should not withhold our love.

"Beloved, let us love one another, for love

is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love." "Be ye followers of God—Walk in love."

II. Motive. "As dear children — As Christ also hath loved us." We have here the second branch of our subject; the motive by which love is urged upon the observance and practice of Christians. There are two such motives presented in the text. (1) The privilege we enjoy as being the children of God, and (2) the perfect example of our Saviour.

1. "Be ye followers of God as dear children," or, be imitators of God as (his) beloved children. As children of God, Christians enjoy his presence graciously vouchsafed to them. They are not forbidden, but are rather encouraged to come to him. They are not debarred the most familiar, provided it be reverential, intercourse with the Most High. They have every facility and encouragement which such free association with the all-loving Father can give to adoring imitation of his perfections. Nor is this all. As *beloved* children they enjoy the special favor of God. They are the subjects of his tender regard and solicitude. How sweet

the words of the Psalmist, "Like as a father pitieth his children so the Lord pitieth them that fear him!" How helpful the admiring exclamation of the beloved disciple. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called and are the children of God!"

Beloved children would fain be like their father. As they reverence and admire him they feel that the best evidence of their loving admiration is to be as much like him as they can. Some of us may tenderly recollect how in the days of childhood we looked up to our father, and he was our ideal of manly excellence, and we longed to be like him. What a blessing is a father's love when it is backed by a strong and true character. There is but one earthly blessing superior to it, and that we recognize as its companion and complement—a mother's. God pity that household where the children ought not to be like their father! God have mercy on that man for whose children the best wish you could make is that they should be as unlike their father as possible!

But to return. If we were outcasts and aliens the case would be different, but as

we are the beloved children of God, is it asking too much of us to try to be like him? I know the struggle is hard, and sometimes almost despairing, but is any struggle too great, any hardship too severe in the pursuit of an object like this? Let us not be disheartened by the failures that we make, but hopefully and bravely strive on, looking eagerly forward to that blessed time when, the struggles over and the failures forgotten, "*we shall be like him,* for we shall see him as he is."

2. "Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice unto God for a sweet-smelling savour." We have here the great example of the Elder Brother to stimulate and encourage us in our efforts to be God-like in the practice of love. As Christ loved us! This is why we *are* the children of God. If you would know how it is that we, all full of imperfection and conscious fault, guilty of breaking God's law and wanderers from his mercy, unworthy, lost, soiled by sin—how *we* are yet the children of God, and, more than that, *beloved* children, behold the explanation: *Christ hath loved us!* "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to thy name give

glory!" Who can tell the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of that surpassing love? May we humbly try to comprehend it, and as we grow in appreciation of it, to grow also in the practice of unselfish love for others.

For this was the measure of Christ's love to us, that he hath given himself for us. In these earthly relations where love plays a prominent part we easily try its genuineness by the willingness it inspires to make personal sacrifices for the loved object. What do you parents think of the love of your children if they are unwilling to give up sometimes their will to yours? What do children, keen observers as they are, think of a parent who lavishes fond caresses, but makes no sacrifices for their pleasure? Are husbands satisfied with protestations of attachment from wives who do not deny themselves sometimes for their pleasure and comfort? And who can say how grievous is the disappointment of a loving wife when she finds a lack of self-denying consideration in him who won her heart with tender speeches? Everywhere we feel that this is the true test of love.

Judged even by this poor human standard how glorious does the love of Christ

appear! What sacrifice did he make as the evidence of his love to us? "He hath given himself for us." Well did he say, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

It was no empty gift, but "an offering and a sacrifice to God." There was sin that had to be blotted out before the divine image in man could be restored. There was a great distance between God Almighty and his erring and fallen creatures. The breach must be healed. There was a broken law, holy and just and good. Its penalties must be met. There was needed for all these things a sacrifice and an offering to God. That was the only thing that could avail to accomplish the great restoration. It was freely given. Not by compulsion, save the compulsion of his own strong love, but of his free choice Christ laid down his life for us. He emptied himself of his glory. He became a man like unto us. As a man he was humiliated still. He accepted death itself. All because he loved us and desired to restore in us the image of God, to restore to us the blessings of God's children.

Nor was the sacrifice vain. It accomplished the purpose for which it was in-

tended. It was to God "a sweet-smelling savour." It floated from this polluted earth as incense to the Holy One. It shone from this sin-darkened world a perfect righteousness. It satisfied the claims of divine justice, it gratified the feelings of infinite pity. The voice of divine approval spoke from on high: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." It was love's offering, and it did love's completest work. It rescued, saved and sanctified those whom it embraced.

And this is to be the rule of our conduct! We are to love as Christ loved us! It is an ideal so lofty that we may well feel our weakness when we look upon it, but we should not fail to try. We ought not to wish for a lower standard, we *could* not have a higher one. Let us then honestly make it the rule of our action towards our fellowmen, especially those who have obtained like precious faith with us; and though we may often fail, let us have the happy consciousness that we tried. And as by this love-deed of Christ we are made through faith the children of God, let us try to become more and more like our Father, being followers of him as dear children. May he graciously aid us in the attempt!

XI

CRISIS AND CREED

"Upon this many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Jesus said therefore unto the twelve, Would ye also go away? Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we have believed and know that thou art the Holy One of God." John 6:66-69.

THE occasion of this tender but searching inquiry is well known. After the miraculous feeding of the five thousand our Lord, and many of his disciples, recrossed the lake, and came back to Capernaum, where in the Synagogue Jesus gave the address reported by John in the 6th chapter of his Gospel. There was great excitement in the multitude over the miracle. Some had wished to force Jesus to declare himself as the Messiah, and set up the earthly kingdom of Israel. It was necessary to curb this premature excitement and to test the sincerity of those who were spiritually won as disciples. Whether this direct purpose was in his mind or not, the result of our Lord's address was such a testing. He charged that many were following him only for the miracle, and

that they might eat of the bread which he could supply without labor to themselves. So he declares himself to be the bread which came down from heaven. It was not material bread, but spiritual, which he came to give. Another thing they must bear in mind. The impulse to make a king of him, under whose reign bread might be had for nothing must be set aside. This was a human appetite, not a divine inspiration. Real spiritual yearnings are kindled from God, not appetite. Furthermore, there must be a real spiritual assimilation of himself. As men live by bread so they should live by him. But the material is only symbolic of the spiritual. The statement is made harsh for the very purpose, it appears, of bringing out the real nature of the impulse which moved the crowd toward discipleship. Jesus declared that his flesh was the bread to be given for the life of the world. There many of the listeners stumbled and scorned. Jesus goes on to explain, but the explanation involves the listeners in further difficulty. Not only were the critics and enemies of the Master aroused by this teaching, but many of his disciples, that is, those who were beginning to become

personally attached to him, stumbled at this saying. The final explanation of his obscure and seemingly repulsive teaching is given in the words, "It is the Spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing; the words I speak unto you they are spirit, and they are life." To the great multitude this clarifying explanation meant nothing. This is the situation in which the question and answer of the text find place. It was a crisis which called forth a creed.

I. The Crisis. It was a crisis for the Master himself. He had not come to set up an empire, but to found a spiritual kingdom. He must shake off those who could see nothing but worldly and material things. It was a crisis for the people who listened. They were brought face to face with the opportunity to choose the spiritual rather than the material. It must appear whether they were ready for the kind of fulfillment of prophecy which the work and teachings of Jesus meant. It was a crisis for the sincere and yet immature disciples, who were nearest to their Lord; who had begun to understand the spiritual side of his mission to the world, but yet had lingering longings for the earthly kingdom of Israel.

The crisis was brought on by the teachings already noted. The words "from that time" mean from the time that our Lord declared himself the bread of life, and insisted that he should be spiritually received as a condition of the soul's life. They rejected this teaching. Their action is not difficult to understand. It is unhappily too common an experience not to be understood. People may be interested to a certain extent in religious things. They may have some impulses toward a real communion with God, and some desire for spiritual life, but the minute they come to a real test they fall away. When our Lord says, "Except ye eat my flesh and drink my blood you have no life in you," they stumble at once and reject the condition proposed. The acceptance of the atoning sacrifice of Christ as the condition of eternal life has ever been a stumbling-block to the average worldly mind. It remains so to this day. A real spiritual union with Jesus as Saviour, with surrender of all worldly and unspiritual principles of life and conduct, is still a difficulty in the way of thousands. In that multitude there were "many disciples" who went back and believed no more in

him. These are fairly typical of many in all ages, not omitting our own, who are attracted by many features of Christian teaching, but stumble at the cross and its meaning. There are many nominal Christians today, and many making no profession of Christianity, who yet admire the character of Jesus, and believe him to have been the greatest and best of all religious teachers, yet when brought to the test of actual acceptance of him as divine Lord and redeeming Saviour will have naught to do with him.

Let us get back to the situation at Capernaum. When the superficial and material throng were irritated and began to leave him, Jesus turned to the twelve and asked, "Will ye also go away?" There is both pathos and power in the question. It was not a whine, a complaint, but the searching inquiry of a Master. He had a right to know. He brings the issue squarely to those who were nearest to him. He did not hesitate nor falter in putting them to the test. The question is prompt, piercing, and final. It has not in it the element of despair, which expects a negative answer. If we might paraphrase the language somewhat it would be

as much as to say, "You are not going to leave me also, are you?" Thus the question, while affectionate and solicitous, has in it no element of doubt except as is later shown in the case of Judas. Jesus knew that he could depend upon the fidelity of eleven out of twelve. He saw that the test would bring out the reality of their attachment, yet the test itself was needed, and was fearlessly made.

The lesson is needed for us of today. The tides of influence are away from what we are accustomed to call the evangelical views of Jesus and his work. Instead of making him a king, to furnish the necessaries of life for nothing, the modern multitude would make him a good man; a teacher to be admired, but disobeyed. Indeed in some quarters the tendency to humanize and rob him of true spiritual life and power has become positively blasphemous. The testing time for true disciples is ever upon us. We can imagine, if we will, how the Lord would look us each in the face and ask us today, "Will ye also go away?" Shall we who have found him, not only the Messiah of whom Moses and the prophets did write, but the Saviour of sinners, and the Lord of life,

forsake him? Shall we listen to the confusing voices that deny his divinity, his atonement, his resurrection, his glory, his second coming? Let us make a personal matter of it. Let us ask ourselves what Jesus really means to us. Shall we go with the thousands who reject him, or come with the few who love and trust him? The question is up. It is always up. The crisis is on us. It is on us every day that we live. In a thousand ways the searching inquiry of the Master comes home to this generation, and to the heart of each one of those who claim him as Saviour and Lord. What shall our answer be when Jesus wants to know whether we will follow the multitude and leave him?

II. The Creed. Peter, speaking for the rest, answers our Lord's inquiry, "Will ye go away." He promptly proposes another inquiry, "To whom shall we go?" This was practical and to the point. It may not be possible to discover all that was in Peter's mind when he promptly returned this response to the Lord's appeal. Still we can see some of the alternatives which were actually open to the disciples, whether they were conscious of them or not. Let us see what some of

these were. If they refused Jesus as Teacher and Saviour and Lord, to what supposed source of spiritual life and power should they turn? Would they go to heathenism? Probably Peter did not consider this as a possible alternative. To the Jews there was no pressing temptation to go to the degraded and discredited and variegated heathenism of the time. That made no appeal to them, but it was an alternative for the age in which they lived. To some extent heathenism is an alternative to the gospel even now. The worship of false gods, in the ancient sense, no longer applies, but the pursuit of vain fancies has never yet died out. Every sort of impostor and imposture has gained a hearing, and now today many more or less seductive forms of thought are offered as an alternative to the acceptance of Jesus Christ. Shall we go to these? Thus the heathenism of the twentieth century, the worship of mammon and of pleasure, the utter disregard of the glorious appeal of the gospel, comes with force to us. Shall we put Christ and all he means or can mean to us out of our minds, and fall in with any of the trends which lead away from him in this busy, bewildering age in

which we live? We still have to answer him with a question; "To whom shall we go?" What is offered to us by anything other than Christianity that we should reject it and accept that other? It is a question we ought to consider. What is there to me, as a modern twentieth century person, in anything except Christ? To whom shall I go with my perplexities and my sins, and my weaknesses, and my ignorance, for real spiritual help amid the problems and burdens of my time?

Perhaps Peter would naturally be thinking more of the religious teachers of his own age and surroundings. He meant, most likely, should they leave Jesus, as a teacher, and go to the Sadducees and Pharisees? Should they reject the wonderful guidance of Jesus, with all its novelty, and hope to fall in with the cold rationalism of the Sadducees, or the hypocritical formalism of the Pharisees? Did the Sadducees, who prided themselves on their intellectual and social standing, who denied the supernatural, believing in neither angel nor spirit, offer any real help to one whose spiritual needs were keenly felt? Should they go to these with the hope of finding any relief from sin, or any

hope of immortality? On the other hand, should they go to the opposite party, and fall in with the scrupulous, self-righteous Pharisees, who prided themselves on their orthodoxy, even to the minutest detail, but omitted the weightier matters of the law? Already the freshness and power of Christ's teaching has exposed the hollowness and pretense of Pharisaic tradition and practice. There was nothing in Pharisaism to appeal to a genuinely awakened and concerned spiritual nature.

We see, of course, that these two forms of thought and practice are still present as alternatives to the spiritual acceptance of Jesus. It is open to the twentieth century man to fall into the rationalistic, intellectual, skeptical, proud, hopeless throng of the modern Sadducees. But does this alternative appeal to one who really feels his need of relief from sin? Does this conception of things offer any real alternative to the gospel? What will one gain to throw away the Christ of the cross, the Christ of history, the Christ of experience, for the cool and unsatisfying doubts and speculations of any moral human philosophy? Or take the other alternative. There may be some so-called Christians to-

day, who live on forms and scruples rather than on the bread of life. External attachment to a church, scrupulosity in creed and conduct may take the place of vital godliness and a deep personal experience of the saving power of Jesus Christ. Does this sort of external and shallow religiousness present any real and worthy claim as a substitute for a genuine, a deep and reverent personal acceptance of Christ? Peter's question, which was also an answer, may well be ours, too; "To whom shall we go?"

Peter's answer, however, was more than a question. It brought a very positive declaration, and this is the essence and body of the whole. The declarative part of his answer is twofold, relating to the teaching and the teacher: "Thou hast words of eternal life, and we have believed and know that thou art the Holy One of God." The leader of the apostles expresses the sentiments of the group. There before them was the great truth that Jesus brought such teachings as no other had ever brought, and there in their souls was lodged the acceptance and happy persuasion that God himself had spoken to them in the person of their Lord. This

was a great declaration. Its intellectual and spiritual meaning is complete. It does not go into details. It does not need to. But it grasps the great comprehensive and all important elements of the Christian faith.

On the intellectual side there is the recognition of the essential truth of what Jesus was teaching. "Words of eternal life" meant those words which explained the life eternal, and brought it near to the acceptance of the believers. Jesus had a message concerning the real life of the soul here and hereafter which no other teacher had brought. It was not that others had not believed in the immortality of the soul, and taught it, but there is an immeasurable distance between the sighings of poetry and the deductions of philosophy on the one hand, and the positive statements of Jesus on the other. The wonderful teachings of our Lord, especially as reported in the Gospel of John, bring a message of life and immortality found nowhere else. Men have never wholly given up the hope of life eternal. Even today some great minds have found in the loftiest teachings of science intimations and suggestions of a

life beyond death. Our Lord linked the life of a renewed soul in this world with the life that follows hereafter. The eternal life of which he spoke was not merely the enjoyment of a blessed heaven after death, but it was an impartation of a spiritual life here and now, which should find its completion and glorious fulfillment hereafter. Let us soberly reconsider all that this means. Let us take hold anew of the eternal life of which Jesus speaks. It is real hope, in all the best meanings of hope, while still we live and struggle with our sins. It is then to pass into the highest conscious association with the good and pure, and live forever with God. Many of the conceptions of the future were only suggested in the words of our Lord so far as we know them. But more explicit teachings are brought out in the later words of those whom he authorized to make known his gospel in its fullness. Already Peter began to see that there was more involved than the mere formal acceptance of Jesus as a teacher. He did not simply accept the dictum of one who had thought much and reached conclusions, but he spoke with a glow, or animation of words, that had life in them; life now and

life forevermore. Even today we may feel in our own experience the tremulous gladness which finds expression in Peter's language. In our hearts, to every line of inquiry that might lead us astray, we can answer back to Jesus, "Thou hast words of eternal life." Here our souls repose and wait.

And this was not all. The main thing is the personal relation of the believer to his Lord. "We have believed and know that thou art the Holy One of God." This is the heart of the whole matter. We do not need to inquire into all the process whereby the group of disciples, represented in Peter, had come to this firm and satisfying conviction. It is enough for our present purpose to consider how intense and unquestioned the conviction was. This is the essence of the Christian creed; to accept Jesus Christ as the true representative of God. He is the "Holy One of God," the Messiah promised to Israel, the authorized messenger to mankind. What he says bears the authority of God upon it. What he does is the act of God in and through him. His life and his teachings alike are the revelation of God to mankind. The details can be filled

up. The essential truth is here expressed. This is the Christian creed reduced to its final simplicity. The loyal acceptance of Jesus Christ as Teacher and Saviour and Lord. It is a personal experience. Not a deduction of the reason only, or at all, but a larger and more personal thing than that. Paul expresses it for us in that great word of his, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." Let us fix our minds on one expression, "Worthy of all acceptation," that is, of every acceptance. The whole personality taking hold of Christ. Rational, emotional and volitional movement toward Christ, resulting in complete surrender to him and trust in him is the action of complete acceptance.

To make a personal matter of it, let us imagine a sincere, though perplexed, modern Christian. He faces the imperative crisis of the time. The trend of thought, the mass of feeling, the active life around him all lead and influence him away from Jesus. Many are going away from the Christ and walk no more with him. What shall he do? Moved, as Peter was, he makes to his Lord, to himself and

to friends the solemn declaration, "I have believed and do know that Jesus is the Holy One of God; authorized, and sent as Teacher of the way that leads to God and truth; empowered as Redeemer by suffering to take away sin; glorified as Lord and Sovereign through resurrection and ascension, and promising to come again to establish his kingdom and claim his own." This Christian will say to himself, "I have believed this. It came to me through the respected tradition of those who held it before me. My infant life unfolded under this faith. My willing choice accepted it in my youth. My manhood's struggles have tested and confirmed the experience of my soul. And so, standing here, I quiet the doubtings of my own heart and reach up to my Lord and Master and say, What I have believed I do now experience still. Thou art the Holy One of God to me. Thy voice speaks peace to my troubled soul. Thy presence assures my trembling and doubting heart, and on this vantage ground of personal trust and conscious love I say to everything that would call me away from my Lord, to whom and to what shall I go from him? Not to cold, godless atheism, that has no word of help to a

struggling spirit. Not to a proud, critical denial of all historic tradition that means and brings through crowding years the message of divine redeeming grace. Not to any modern cult or whimsy or one-sided exaggeration of half truth. Not to the idols of the market place, nor to the sirens of intoxicating pleasure. Not to the lure of distinction, nor the crushing burden and care of greed or of gold. Not to any of these do my thoughts or feelings turn for help and comfort in my spiritual life. Not to any of these for a ray of hope to shine upon the tomb and beckon my yearning spirit to the life forevermore. Oh, no! With a quieted heart and an assured calm of soul, amid all distracting voices and magnetic counter-currents, I answer back to my Saviour: Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we have believed and do know that thou art the Holy One of God."

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